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THE WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE WATERDALE

NEIGHBOURS

OF

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VOL. 188

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IN TWO VOLUMES VOL. 188

VOL. II. NEW AND IMPROVED

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1868

A NEW EDITION

THE WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS

IN TWO VOLUMES VOL. 188

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THE WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1868.

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THE WATERBURY NEIGHBOURS OF TOWN II

Page	CHAPTER I. General History
1	I. Waterbury and the Indians' War
38	II. The Indians
55	III. Double Deceit
73	IV. Another Deceit
87	V. The Indians' War
111	VI. The Indians' War
130	VII. The Indians' War
144	VIII. The Indians' War
160	IX. The Indians' War
183	X. The Indians' War
198	XI. The Indians' War
231	XII. The Indians' War
250	XIII. The Indians' War
270	XIV. The Indians' War
285	XV. The Indians' War
299	XVI. The Indians' War

1868

The History of Waterbury is recorded

CONTENTS

OF VOLUME II.

	Page
CHAPTER I. "Lennon's Folly"	7
— II. Warton and his Neighbour's Wife	33
— III. On the Platform	58
— IV. Double Defeat	75
— V. Sudden Hope — sudden Disappointment	87
— VI. "Thou shalt renounce"	111
— VII. Another Appeal	126
— VIII. Flood and Fever	144
— IX. Known too late	167
— X. Myra makes a Discovery, and profits by it	192
— XI. Warton makes a Discovery, and does not profit	208
— XII. What he saw	231
— XIII. Faithful Unbelief	259
— XIV. "O, that's sudden!"	275
— XV. Degeneration of the Heart	285
— XVI. Lennon's first and last Untruth	299

THE CONTENTS WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS OF VOLUME II

Page	CHAPTER I
1	I. "Lambton's Story"
22	II. "Watson and his Neighbourhood"
23	III. "On the Planners"
24	IV. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
25	V. "Then shall we see"
26	VI. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
27	VII. "Another Appeal"
28	VIII. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
29	IX. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
30	X. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
31	XI. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
32	XII. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
33	XIII. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
34	XIV. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
35	XV. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
36	XVI. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
37	XVII. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
38	XVIII. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
39	XIX. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
40	XX. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
41	XXI. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
42	XXII. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
43	XXIII. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
44	XXIV. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
45	XXV. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
46	XXVI. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
47	XXVII. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
48	XXVIII. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
49	XXIX. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"
50	XXX. "The moral struggle began to become at last an accomplished fact"

THE WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS.

CHAPTER I.

"Lennon's Folly."

As the model village began to become at last an accomplished fact, Lennon's difficulties with his neighbours became greater and greater. Mere difficulty in setting the scheme going and helping to work it he had fully counted on, and rather liked; but he did not calculate upon the stiff chopping breeze of religious and moral objection which he was now to encounter.

Only two months had passed away since we last saw him, and he was already banned by the religious microcosm of Waterdale. Even Dr. Alwyn, his much-enduring, tolerant, and patient friend, had preached against him, and condemned his philanthropic efforts as a godless illusion, a stumbling-block, and a snare. He had preached this out of the pulpit of his church; and wherever he went, into whatever villa, or cottage, or shop, he declared his condemnation of Lennon's scheme as irreligious and republican, setting class

against class, and ignoring the teachings of the Church. For when once Dr. Alwyn came to think that anything really was irreligious he gave it no tolerance. He could shut his eyes to candles, and his ears to questionable chantings at wrong moments; he was not very rigid as regards the exact size of Noah's ark, and he was quite content to let geology have its say, he fearing not; but there were bounds to his principles of toleration, as there are to those of most people, and Lennon had quite unconsciously transgressed them.

Marry, how? What ignorant sin had he committed?

First of all he followed Carlyle's advice, and took his stand on the alphabet. In other words, he invited to his village schools all boys and girls, men and women, who would come and receive a purely secular instruction. He taught arithmetic and spelling and history and geography; and left his pupils and fellow-students to get their religious teaching elsewhere — which they could easily do, for, backward as the place was, there was no lack whatever of machinery for the teaching of sectarian dogma, and the lists of the great kings and captains of the Scriptures, and who begat whom. Truly these bones of theology and Jewish history Dr. Alwyn and his wife had begun to clothe a little with the flesh, and quicken with the spirit, of warm Christian faith and charity and enlightenment; but even their approaches in that direction were over

dusty, dry, and uninviting ground, the Waterdale instincts much preferring the hard and gritty old routine of teaching by rote and letter, which vexed not the brain and troubled not the heart. But against Lennon, who, as he said himself, could only "go in" for secular education, and thought he had better do that than do nothing, leaving the other work to other men — against him all united and combined. The ruling elders of the place rose as a man against unadulterated geography, and told all their dependents and confiding followers that arithmetic on its own merits stood condemned. Even Dr. Alwyn felt a little ashamed of his following, though not of his cause, when a good lady of Waterdale discovered heresy in a doctrine which she was given to understand Mr. Lennon taught or sanctioned — the belief, namely, that of the stars which were made solely for man's mere use and enjoyment, tapers to light his nightly path, there were probably certain orbs so far away that man's eyes or instruments could never get to see a ray of them. If this was not heresy, then, the worthy lady asked Dr. Alwyn, what was? And his attempt mildly and soothingly to convince her that her judgment was somewhat rash only made her more wroth against the heresy and indignant with the heretic.

Then it must be owned that the coöperation of Tom Berry did not much tend to render Lennon's scheme popular with elders and vested interests. "Whatever a man of the sons of men shall say in his heart of the

lords above," Tom Berry was very apt to say out aloud of the aristocratic, moneyed, and other classes who are lords above of our social system. Moreover, he had the ill-luck to infuse a savour of his old-world views into whatever subject he talked about, with whomsoever he talked. That every evil wherewith this country is occasionally afflicted is due to the pressure of an aristocratic and oligarchical system, kept up partly by peers, partly by millionnaires, and partly by the timid or time-serving politicians who truckle to them, was Tom's principal article of faith. No Calvinist, no Hebrew, no Spanish Catholic, ever held to his creed with a more thorough and intolerant belief than Tom did to this. He made it his touchstone of all human worth. Blench from these principles, and you must be either a craven or a knave. Third way there was none. Even Lennon this last of the Chartists sometimes suspected in bitter and distrustful moments, when he saw him friendly with Walter Warton or confiding with the Alwyns; and the more these latter became gradually estranged from Ralph, the more Tom admired his leader and rejoiced.

The cottages did not fill. Some few families were there; but the occupants most ready to offer themselves were so plainly of the tramp class that their application had to be instantly rejected; and the resident population more and more fought shy of the business. As yet the vainest of dreamers could not flatter himself

that he had accomplished any good. The self-governing system had not even got into operation, for there were not people enough in occupation to set it going. The schools ceased to have students. The tramp class came and occupied cottages here and there of nights, and could hardly be ejected until, desiring change of scene, they chose to depart of their own good pleasure. An incident occurred, too, which brought even graver scandal.

Readers will remember casual mention of a certain Bessie Raynes, to whom Mrs. Alwyn had been very kind, and about whom she once expressed herself to her husband as very uneasy. Bessie had been unwisely listening to the compliments of a young man of much better class than her own; and scandal had come; and Bessie had been much reproved, and promised to be wiser in future, and became not any wiser.

Bessie one day left the place, and disappeared — not too soon, people said; "for you know one can't help noticing, my dear," one virtuous matron remarked to another; "and really when I saw her the night before last, I could not but see," &c. &c.

She disappeared, and the neighbourhood thought they had a good riddance of her for ever; and the young man alluded to had gone abroad for some time; and people thought the whole thing was happily got over. But after some months had elapsed, Tom Berry, going one morning into one of the empty cottages, was

encountered by a feeble moan and two wistful hollow eyes; and saw a thing all rags and rain huddled on the floor; and learned that wretched Bessie Raynes had been only wandering a helpless vagrant through the country, and had come back, fate-driven, to the familiar place, and, not daring to knock at any door once friendly, had crept from the rain-storm that was pouring down into the desolate cottage, and prayed that she might not be turned from the fireless hearth.

Tom Berry assuredly was not the man to expel her. She was in his eyes now simply one other victim of a bloated and profligate aristocracy — the grandfather of her seducer, be it remarked, was a man who had made money in Liverpool by selling candles. Tom Berry told the story to Lennon, who insisted on his old housekeeper (whose niece indeed the girl was) going to look after her, and had the cottage furnished and warmed, and made comfortable for her, and had a doctor to attend upon her constantly, until her infant was born and she died. Whereupon Mrs. Beck, stimulated by Ralph, and herself now somewhat penitent, gave the child over to a married niece of her husband's to be cared for and brought up; and Lennon undertook to meet the expense of maintaining it; and Tom Berry constantly went to look after it: and O, what a scandal the whole story created, and what explanations were invented to save human nature the pain of believing in any disinterested benevolence!

Indeed if the half-empty cluster of cottages had been the Agapemone or a Mormon colony there could not have been more shaking of the head and shuddering than there was since the unlucky day when an outcast woman died and a nameless child was born there.

So the Lennon scheme was becoming day by day a more and more disastrous failure. It might well have been called, as Dr. Alwyn predicted, Lennon's Folly. Lennon himself was highly unpopular all over the neighbourhood; and at last it would have been difficult to name the excess of heresy and general wickedness which the good people of Waterdale would not have believed him quite ready to plunge into.

He held his ground, however, very coolly, and by no means gave up the fight.

"Time and you and I, Tom, against any three," he said one day (paraphrasing the words of Walter Scott) to his trusty henchman.

Tom shook his head.

"They're a rotten lot here," was the henchman's forcible remark. "There's nothing in them, poor creatures; no more back-bone than a wet playbill. I'm sick of them all; and if I was you, Mr. Lennon, I'd cut the whole wretched concern, and go right away back to Australia."

But Lennon's thoughts and hopes were not now

fixed quite exclusively on the success of his project of futile benevolence. He paid frequent visits to London, and was beginning to think himself growing younger.

"No, Tom," he replied cheerily, "I'm not going to give in just yet. These people are dreadfully averse to novelty of any kind; wait a little until they get used to the thing, and you may be sure they will come round. We can afford to live down their bad opinion."

Tom felt inclined to express in strong terms his absolute contempt for their opinion, good or bad; but he only shrugged his shoulders, and said nothing.

"Warton's going in for the borough over at last," said Tom, changing the subject.

The borough which Tom spoke of was the small town of Northinglen, a few miles off, on which Warton had long had designs, and which was, in fact, his last chance of a seat in Parliament. We have already noticed a peculiarity about this borough which rendered it fitting for the purpose. It was essentially a working-man's constituency — one of the few which chance, and 1832, and freemen's franchises, and other things had spared; and no man might hope to sit for that borough who did not please the sturdy Northern working men; and the votes of these decent artisans no man might buy for gallons of ale or sly bank-notes slipped into the hands of ready-witted wives. Therefore there was a chance there for Warton, and a tempting

prospect for the Tories, who had usually little hope of obtaining the control of such a seat. Could Warton talk over the working voters there into the belief that, while Toryism and bloated aristocracy were bad things in the abstract, and usually admitted to be enemies of freedom, yet at this particular juncture of affairs the Tories, and they alone, might safely be intrusted with the honour and the fortunes of England, now imperilled by the wiles of Bonapartean diplomacy and the plottings of continental despotism? That was the question.

That was the question which Tom Berry expounded now at considerable length, and after his own fashion, to Lennon, whose wandering attention, we fear, hardly took it all in.

“That’s it, you see, Mr. Lennon — there’s their game. It’s a plot, a downright plot, as much as if they swore to it over skulls and crossbones, as they used to at the old Coburg in the time when I was an apprentice, and used to take my place in the front row of the gallery. It’s a plant, a plot, a dirty Tory dodge; but I know how to spoil the game. I know a few chaps over in the town that are in a manner a sort of leaders among the workshops, fellows with the gift of the gab — and good-hearted fellows too, though one of ’em’s a Sunday open-air preaching man, and another’s a teetotal card — and I’ve opened their eyes a bit; and wait if you don’t see.”

"Then you don't think Mr. Warton has any chance, Tom?"

"No; beg your pardon — I think he'd have a prime chance, if he'd got the pluck, the go in him! Bless you, these men are so sick of the Whigs, and the sham Liberals and the whole humbugging lot of Parliament spouters, that I don't know if they wouldn't be glad to give a chance to a decent, manly, outspoken Tory who stood up to them *like* a man. No, Mr. Lennon; I think Wat Warton could make a chance if he had the spirit. But I know something about him; and I know that the roar of a good row about his ears will knock the feet from under him in no time; and you know that a crowd is like a horse, and soon finds out the man that can ride it and rein it, and delights to roll in the mud the chicken-hearted creature that can't."

"Well, Tom, I am glad neither you nor I count among the voters, for if we did I fear we should have to take opposite sides. I don't myself care twopence for Whigs or Tories — plague o' both their houses! — and I should like to serve Mr. Warton; and so I think I should be weak and unpatriotic enough to give him my vote and helping hand. Confess, you last of the Romans, that you think me unworthy of the name of Briton?"

"It takes a deal in these times to make anybody unworthy of the name of Briton," Mr. Berry remarked

sententiously. "I wish we could make the name of Briton a little more worthy of honest men and free men. That's all!"

Lennon paid little attention to Berry's prophetic hints about the fate of Warton in the approaching struggle. His mind was wholly estranged from politics of late; and even the fate of his philanthropic chimera concerned him far less than it might have done a few months ago. Questioning his own motives and emotions — playing sadly with his own feelings, as in loneliness he was sometimes wont to do — he made melancholy admission that a private and individual love rose up between him and his good wishes to his race, or his neighbourhood. The smile of a woman hardly beyond the school-girl age was more to him just now than the regeneration of a city. He could have borne any other failure with composure; he could have calmly lighted a fresh cigar and puffed it unemotional while listening to the news of the wreck of his schemes and the ruin of his whole fortune; but he could not bring himself to ask Grace Ethelstone to marry him, dreading the terrible reply that she had always regarded him as a brother or a father, or in some other hideous and revolting aspect, and that she could not love him. He saw in her bright frank ways no sign of love, and he dreaded to invite a decision. "Wait yet a little," said his heart one day; "her affection will grow." And another day it said, "Coward and fool!"

let the question be settled and done with for ever. Know the worst and bear it — as you can do if you will." And yet again: "For shame! to think even of asking the girl, who knows nobody but you, who never disguises her warm sisterly affection, and who, if you press her, may easily mistake her feelings, or generously trample them under foot, and marry you out of pure good-nature, and find out her mistake too late — and yet all too soon. Be a man of spirit and honour. Do not try by that test a question to which common sense must tell you how to give an answer. If you love her, be just to her — and leave her to freedom."

Between these impulses Lennon's resolution flickered for some time—now drawn this way, now driven that. Great souls, of course, are never thus undecided. Heroes of fiction never ought to be. In whatever stress of difficulty, they ought to see their way clear before them, and march without a moment's hesitation steadfastly along it. In a former work (which received such kindly and encouraging criticism as the author thinks of with gratefulness) there was a hero — at least a so-called hero — who on some rather important occasions of his life had some little difficulty and trouble about making up his mind. He received much critical condemnation for this lamentable weakness. Heroes of novels never ought to have any difficulty in making up their minds. They ought, at the worst, to achieve the whole of the operation as quickly as the

Earl of Derby's Cabinet accomplished it last February. The only excuse to be pleaded is that in real life most of us do actually find ourselves, at certain emergencies, much embarrassed as to what course we ought to take — do resolve upon one thing to-night, and next morning think another thing would be better; and by noon reject both plans; and perhaps find the question arbitrarily decided for us by chance in the end — chance being to many of us the flight of birds rising from the left or the right, the indications of the sacred entrails, the omens of the stars, the answer resounding from the tripod, and all the other external impulses to lagging decision which even the heroes of the old world did not disdain to invite.

At all events, by every example of ancient and mediæval and modern hero, we may claim some pardon and indulgence for one who is only a hero in the conventional and circulating-library sense, if he hesitated a little about inviting a final and perhaps a fatal decision from the woman he loved. Even Roland or Lancelot of the Lake might have felt less firmly decided about challenging the sentence of his mistress than about storming a castle or slaying a Saracen.

Besides, Ralph had of late observed, or fancied he observed, a certain reserve and coldness in Grace Ethelstone's manner towards himself. As he waxed into warmth and demonstrativeness, she waned, he thought, into chilliness and restraint. Perhaps she

understood his attentions, and wished to signify thus quietly that she could not accept them. He was distressed by her manner, which, of course, if it had had the slightest gleam of coquettishness about it, might have been encouraging; and if it had seemed to be the reserve and timid embarrassment arising from a girl's natural wish to hide her feelings, would have been a source of rapture to him; but it seemed to be neither. It appeared quite spontaneous, unfeigned, and real. The more and more he became the accepted guide and helper of Mabel and the family, the more Grace appeared to draw back from him.

Of course, everyone will have guessed that he sent off at once to Mabel the money which she so much needed at the time when he had his memorable conversation on the bridge with Grace. Mabel took the money delightedly; it relieved her from immense embarrassment; and she wrote Ralph a letter of incoherent and effusive thanks. She told Grace with joy and pride of the assistance she had received, and was utterly unable to understand the deep depression and vexation with which her niece received the gladsome news. Poor Mabel when in a fix never cared how she got out of it, provided there was nothing sinful in the means of escape; and she could not understand in the least how anybody could object to her taking a little help from the liberal hand of an old and dear friend.

"Ralph would do anything for me, child," she said with a sort of mild complacent triumph. "He would indeed, dear old Ralph; though, of course, he doesn't care for me now at all, except just as a friend. I don't quite think he fully appreciates Walter even yet; men, I suppose, don't forget these things for a long time. Anger outlives love, Grace, I fear. But he would do anything for me; and I know he would be little pleased to think of me and the children being in any difficulty, and not asking him to help us out of it. Besides, you must remember that he is a bachelor as yet, and he really has nothing to do with his money. I am sure if he wanted money and we had it —"

"Which is not likely," interjected Grace.

"No, indeed, dear; not likely at all, I fear, for the present — at least, until Walter gets a place of some kind. But I was going to say that if Ralph Lennon wanted money, and we had it, he should have it with delight from me — and from Walter too, Grace."

"What will Walter say to this begging of money from Mr. Lennon?"

"It's not begging, Grace; I wonder you can talk so. Do you think we are robbers?"

"Robbers don't generally beg, I believe, except in *Gil Blas* perhaps."

"Well, beggars then. Do you think we are beggars?"

"Yes, Mabel, I do. I think it is nothing short of begging to take this money from Mr. Lennon. I hate to think of the whole thing. Rather than stoop to such a transaction, I would have pawned my watch or sold my last dress."

"O, for shame, Grace, to talk in such a way; and such childish nonsense too, as if all the dresses I have in the world would bring a quarter of two hundred pounds, even if they were new; and you see what my purple silk is looking like already, after three months! Besides, you don't understand Ralph Lennon —"

"Do I not? Ah, yes I do!" Grace sighed unconsciously, but so distinctly that Mabel looked at her with kindly, feeling, motherly eyes.

"Well, dear, what I mean is, that you cannot think he cares about a few pounds lent to a friend. Only lent, you know, of course. Why, child, you don't suppose Walter won't repay every farthing of it?"

"Then Walter knows of it?"

"O yes, of course. I would not have any secret from Walter for all the world. We never had any secrets from each other — never."

"And Walter approves?"

"Quite approves. More than that, my dear, — and I only tell it to show how nonsensical your

scruples were; for you know that Walter is one of the most sensitive of men, — it was he who suggested getting a loan of a few pounds from Ralph. He said when he was going away that if any pressing demand should be made on us during his absence, it might be as well to write a line to Ralph. So odd that he should have said it too, when I am sure he did not know that any difficulty was likely to occur; for he would have told me if he had expected this vexatious call upon us just then."

"He arranged it all beforehand, then? And he asked you to write?"

"No; not exactly that. He said something about your being on the spot, and mentioning the matter to Ralph; but I suppose it was better that you did not do anything in the matter. Unmarried girls cannot be expected to make such requests; and indeed, Grace, I hope you will never have to make them of anyone."

Grace had been glowing with shame and anger during this conversation. She, then, was to have been used as an instrument to extract money to pay Walter Warton's debts — and to extract it from Ralph Lennon! Her cheeks burned with vexation and resentment. But she said not a word. To open up the question to Mabel would be the most futile waste of breath and temper.

"Do you know, Grace," said Mabel, after a mo-

ment's pause, "I sometimes think Ralph Lennon is very fond of you?"

"Do you?"

"This was said coldly, and without the slightest emphasis of tone, or appearance of interest in the question.

"Indeed I do. I grow more and more convinced of it every day. My dear, I don't want to influence you, of course; but any woman Ralph Lennon marries ought to be happy; and you would suit him, for you have brains and are clever, and could fall in with his ways and appreciate him, which other women could not do. O, I should be so glad if I could think —"

"Please, Mabel, don't — O please don't talk in that way! I shall never be able to look Mr. Lennon in the face if you go on in such a manner! Don't, dear Mabel, don't let him think he has fallen among thieves, like the man who went down into Jericho."

"Grace!"

"Yes; that we are all determined to plunder him, and drag him into toils, and lay schemes and snares and base matrimonial plots for him, because he has money. I would never meet him again — never, never! — if I thought he suspected anything of the kind. He has never bestowed a thought on me — why should he? — except as a friend, as a poor girl whom he would serve and help in life if he could —"

as he would help anyone, indeed, who wanted help. He has never thought of me in any other way; and of course I have — I have never thought of him. Don't let us speak of it any more; it tortures me to think of his hearing a whisper of such a thing — a whisper perhaps from one of the children — and despising us. He may pity us now; I fear he cannot help that, and it is bad enough; but he cannot yet despise us. Do not force him to that too."

"My dear Grace, I don't quite understand you; but of course I respect and like your sensitiveness. And you surely don't imagine *I* would ever say a word to place a girl, even if she were not my own niece, in an awkward and embarrassing position towards a man, even so honourable a man as Ralph Lennon? No, no, you foolish child. But I was merely talking of what I had observed — talking of it between ourselves."

"But we ought not to talk of it between ourselves, or to talk of it or think of it at all. It seems so mean and ignoble and unwomanly. I know, Mabel, that you do not mean it so, and would not say it if you could only see things with my eyes just for a moment. But pray don't speak of it any more. You are quite mistaken, believe me — utterly mistaken. And I only wish you had never thought of it at all."

Mabel gave in and said no more; but thought she was right for all that.

Grace was seriously and bitterly grieved.

"Why are some women, even good women, so mean?" she asked herself. "Why can they never hear a friendly word exchanged, see a cordial clasp of the hand given, between a girl and a man, but they suggest and suspect plottings and secret designs about marriage? This kind-hearted and simple aunt of mine does not, in her inmost soul, believe one word I say. She thinks my heart is set on marrying Mr. Lennon, and — good Heaven! — she would think nothing, in her simple, credulous candour, of assuming that he was actually in love with me, and taking him into her full confidence, and disgracing us all. Rather than bear that humiliation, rather than endure that he should despise me, or should confound me in his mind with the miserable schemes of our beggarly and ignoble life, I would go to the other end of the earth. I have stayed too long here. I have given up much for poor Mabel; but I cannot give up my pride of independence, and I will not be shamed in his eyes. Whatever happens, he shall not think me mean and selfish and craven of spirit. I don't ask for his love" (and tears burst into her eyes), "but I will have at least his respect."

This conversation, interjected awkwardly enough into a chapter of which the scene is laid in Cumberland, will serve to explain why Grace Ethelstone seemed to Lennon to receive him now with less of confiding cordiality than she used to show. He began to think

sadly that this change of demeanour could have no purpose but one, that of conveying to him in as delicate a manner as possible her personal disinclination for lovmaking so far as he was concerned. Lennon, of course, had eyes — very keen eyes too — for the demeanour of those around him. Love never blinds us to the significance of our reception at the hands of the loved one's brother or mother or father, or even aunt. The dullest among us has never failed to gather from the looks and ways of *her* people whether the said people thought us a desirable person to become a member of the family. As regards Lennon, there was hardly any attempt at concealment. Mabel's manner conveyed, as clearly as anything short of words could express a feeling, her earnest anxious wish for Ralph and Grace to fall desperately in love with each other. Very little encouragement would have brought words in plenty from her lips to make still clearer the impression which her manner conveyed. Walter Warton seldom failed when he met Ralph to sound in a delicate and indirect way the praises of his niece. All this, however, was now only embarrassing to Lennon. He dreaded being regarded as the benefactor of the family, whom Grace was bound to marry out of gratitude whenever he asked her; and he mentally vowed that if once he came to know her true feelings, no word of his should ever tempt her to a sacrifice. "I have never held," he said to himself, "that a man has

a right to persecute a girl because it is her misfortune and his that he can't help loving her. Let him stifle his love — or himself, if he can do nothing better; but let *her* be free to choose. And I hope I am not yet mean enough to take advantage of any influence I may have with a girl's family — any old regard they may have for me — to persuade her into marrying me. No: she would have little to congratulate herself on if she married me of her own free and loving will; she shall never be coerced or persuaded or talked into doing anything else. If she could care for me — if she could! — then I think I could make her happy; and I should seem to have lived for something, and this dull and dreary life would be exquisite and bright. But, good heavens, who is happy? Who has what he wants? And why do I expect to be any better off than my neighbours?"

Still he had some little hope. That is obvious enough, even from the final question into which his thoughts shaped themselves. When one asks himself what right he has to expect this or that, it is pretty certain that, whether he has the right or no, he does somehow cherish the expectation. Despair does not pause to interrogate itself in that sort of way. Ralph Lennon had some hope. He would not yet believe that Grace cared nothing for him; but he shrank from testing his hope, and perhaps proving it false. He recoiled from the blank prospect which life must once more present

if he should find the light of that one hope suddenly extinguished. And he found, of course, discreet, prudential, and practical reasons to justify his delay yet a little longer. "If she really does not care for me it will be better, far better, for her sake that I should not subject her to the pain of having to refuse, and perhaps to bear the well-meant agonising remonstrances of Warton and Mabel. No — if I can save her from that it will be something. I am not quite a fool — I certainly am not quite a boy; and though I don't pretend to much knowledge of the ways of women, yet I ought to be able to find out, without asking, whether a girl loves me or not." And then he thought again and again over every word she said; he revelled in a Barmecide feast of glances that seemed loving and pressures of the hand that might have meant sympathy; he found flattering reasons for coldness, and coined hope out of even silence and absence. And then, another mood setting in, he blew all the golden mist and airy chimeras of lover's dreams roughly away, and spurned at himself as a fool, and took the worst as the reality, and tried to look it full in the face. Amid the little trumpery vexations which were surrounding him at home, — the failure of his chimerical plan, the marked and general unpopularity and coarse disfavour with which the people of Waterdale received him, the almost universal reproach which had come upon him just because he tried to do a little good, the falling-

away of friends, the gibes and rejoicings of enemies, — it was something strengthening and elevating to have this sanctuary of his heart, to which he could retire and commune with even the hope of a love, and set up his Madonna-shrine, and worship it, even though with unheard and futile adoration. He had passed the age when men storm and swear, Swinburne-like, against the most high gods, and defy earth and skies and the inexorable Immortals, and rejoice to pelt their poor little detonating thunder-pellets against the cloud-shapes that veil the heavens. He could no longer enjoy the sweet consoling egotism which sees an implacable war of man against destiny in every chance breath that blows away some tiny thistledown of human hope. So his melancholy, his occasional heart-sickness of deferred hope, his not uncommon intervals of blank despair, were unrelieved by any of the cheering and comforting vanity which makes a disappointed youth regard himself as a Prometheus specially punished by the gods; an Ixion, chained to an eternal wheel because he had dared to love. Indeed, his mental condition had something of the peculiar discomfort about it which the noble old hero and humorist, Abraham Lincoln, so pithily described after the news of some profound disaster. "I find it hard to bear," said the great President, "because I am too much hurt to laugh, and I am too big to cry." Lennon was sometimes too much hurt to laugh, and he was past the age for crying — even

for crying out against Fate, and heroically arraigning the order of things.

And poor Grace meanwhile had a weary time enough of it. It used to be one of her great delights, her self-appointed reward for dreary duties cheerfully and satisfactorily got through, to shut herself up in her own room sometimes, away from Mabel and the children and the maids and everything, and indulge herself in an hour of delight with her pencils, her drawing-paper, and her fresh young imagination. But now her work and her play had alike less absorbing power. She did not enjoy her hour of seclusion with her drawing, and her imagination ran quite away from Antigone and the classic marbles, and her self-culture made no progress at all. The short time she allowed herself for such purposes wasted itself away in fruitless thought and longing and pining. She would sit over her paper for an hour without having once drawn a pencil-line upon it, and then sigh and put the task away from her — once it used not to be a task, but a joy and a refreshment — and try to lose herself in the common life of the house. Once she was sitting and thinking sadly enough, and more than vaguely enough, when a noisy clattering came at the door, and she found herself beleaguered by boisterous little Watty. She surrendered unconditionally, and admitted the young invader. He had come to remind her of a promise to draw him a knight on horseback, and he in-

sisted upon her redeeming her pledge before she put away her pencils; so she drew him a splendid cavalier, magnificent in mail and sweeping plume, and bestriding a rampant steed whose mane and tail might have been the envy of the Fair One with Golden Locks; and Watty was delighted.

"O, dear," thought Grace, half-smiling, half-inclined to cry, "how I wish *he* were a knight, and were going to the wars; and that I might dress myself like a page and go with him — and be killed!"

CHAPTER II.

Warton and his Neighbour's Wife.

THE clouds were thickening and blackening around Walter Raleigh Warton. A storm must come, and either destroy his fields altogether, or carry off the bad weather and give him purer air and the chance of a better harvest. In plain language, he was near a financial crisis. He was literally steeped in debt; and he could only buy even a temporary postponement of a crash by opening up new sources of indebtedness. He had started in life as a Swell Democrat, if we may use that term; and he felt convinced it was the best sort of enterprise, if only he could just get time to round a certain difficult point and make his way into the smooth water of a parliamentary career. He had a certain pride in being a Swell Democrat; indeed, he considered that he had created the part. For the *rôle* he had introduced was by no means to be confounded with the familiar part of the Patrician Democrat — the part played by the scion of some noble house who, from sincere conviction, or personal vanity, or love of novelty and adventure, becomes a leader of the people. This part Warton, of course, knew to be quite out of his line. Even the name of Raleigh and the vaguely-

implied descent would not make of him a Charles James Fox, a Mirabeau, an Edward Fitzgerald, a Smith O'Brien, or even a Tom Duncombe. But he thought he could conceive and impersonate a new kind of demagogue — a refined and glorified working man; a being who, while he boasted of being only one generation removed from the working man (with perhaps some hint of a grand ancestral source far back in historical days, the stream whereof unfortunately became almost lost in the sand and mud of later years), should yet have the manners, the appearance, the delicate features, the white hands of your azure-blooded aristocrat; who should have the tastes, the luxurious habits, even the extravagance of the patrician; who should smoke cigars with elder sons, walk down to the House arm-in-arm with county members, and talk dinner-table nonsense to countesses. Now he had played this part very bravely, very cleverly, and with a certain fluctuating and tantalising degree of success; but as yet without anything like the success he had anticipated. He was now rather poorer than ever; his flirtations with countesses had been but rare and passionately remembered delights; and his political patrons were beginning to distrust him; that is, his new political patrons — those under whose auspices he started in life had dropped him down long ago. If he could get into the House and make any kind of way there, and render such service to his new party as would secure

him a permanent office, or even drag him into the ranks of those who are always marked for parliamentary office when their party is in — if he could do this, all might go well. He could manage to pay his debts somehow — an M.P. can get over many difficulties insurmountable to a poor outsider; and then place of some kind would surely fall to his lot. Once in the House, what might not ambition and talents accomplish? Look at Canning! Look at Disraeli! Nay, look at Bright, who doubtless, if he cared for office and went the right way to get it, would have been a Cabinet Minister years ago. Why might not he, Walter Raleigh Warton, accomplish something? In fact, behind the swinging doors of the House of Commons gleamed for him his El Dorado.

The one sad obstacle in his way was, he thought, his poverty. He writhed under poverty. He raged against it. He cursed it for every failure. He laid all blame on it — on it and on destiny. In no other country, he thought, would narrow means have so obstructed a man as in England. Let him borrow as he would and spend as he would, he could not even seem to be anything but poor. Captain Eastham and others of his friends, when discussing his parliamentary prospects, seemed to take his poverty as an admitted thing, a matter of course, a fact necessarily to be considered in making the calculations. No class of persons in the world are more frank in admitting and discussing the

impecuniosity of themselves and their friends than young men of family in England; no class care less about money in estimating the relative value of their acquaintances and associates. Warton might have known this, for he had mixed a good deal, of late, with the young patrician class; and yet every allusion which betrayed a knowledge of his poverty stung and startled him. He was secretly very bitter against destiny and the social laws which prevented a hard-up, unprincipled adventurer of showy talents from becoming at once a man of fortune and a Cabinet Minister. He was rather hard upon destiny, too, for having allowed him to marry a poor girl without any brains, or for not having devised some convenient code of British marriage-law which would enable him to get rid of her now and look out for a woman with money.

Now he set, as we have already said, his fate at present upon the chances of the coming or expected election in the peculiar borough described by his old associate and present enemy Tom Berry. This succeeding, all might yet go well; this failing, then the deluge might as well come, so far as he was concerned, for he felt that he could struggle no more, and must succumb; unless — he had just one other chance in reserve — unless Ralph Lennon should come to the rescue. And he saw some prospect of this being easily and somewhat decently arrived at, if Lennon would but fall in love with Grace, and marry her; for Lennon,

he said to himself, was just the man to let his wife do anything with his money if he loved her, and Grace was as good-natured and generous as a child. Warton's imagination and envy had already bestowed on Lennon the riches of a pro-consul or a Liverpool merchant-prince.

So he went to work at his exciting little game of chess; and as he loved excitement for its own sake, he felt a sort of pleasure which counteracted to a certain degree the discomfort of his troubled prospects. But it takes a very exceptional man indeed to play chess with human beings for knights and castles and pawns. In making his finest scheme Warton forgot to allow for the breath of his own passion, which always blew down his pieces, and spoiled his game; and so, just at the time when it behoved him to keep on the best terms with everybody who could in the slightest degree influence his fortunes, an evil fate threw him in the way of Myra Alwyn, and well-nigh spoiled all.

He succeeded in arousing in her mind something like interest and sympathy. She thought him the victim of a boyish passion and an ill-assorted marriage. The manner in which he conveyed this impression to her mind was so skilful that she believed the revelation to be the involuntary disclosure of a mind far too proud, sensitive, and manly to betray willingly the secret of its pain. Then he talked in a strain of apparently profound religious conviction; and there are few women

indeed whom the phrases and symbols of piety cannot deceive. In short, she pitied him, and wished him well; and he had self-conceit enough to believe that he discerned in her manner the indications of a deeper feeling.

Captain Eastham, whose house he made for the present his principal head-quarters, was much taken with the Alwyns, husband and wife, and was very glad to drive over to their house in company with Warton, and have luncheon or dinner there. And of course the honourable and gallant member was not very long in discerning that there was something rather too devoted and tender in the manner of his friend towards the wife of his other friend. Eastham was a thoroughly manly young fellow, and he did not at all like that sort of thing.

"I tell you what, Warton," he said, as they drove home one night, "you are carrying this a little too far. It won't do, man; give it up in time."

"Give what up, my dear fellow?"

"Now, don't play the innocent. You know what I mean; for you saw me sending warning looks to-night. Glad nobody else noticed anything —"

"But do favour me with some glimpse of your meaning."

"I mean your manner towards Alwyn's wife. It is becoming quite marked; and it will be sure to attract

some notice from more unfriendly and suspicious eyes than mine, and make a row of some kind."

"My good fellow, how can you talk so? What evil constructions you fast men — men of the world — put upon everything! I like Mrs. Alwyn much. I hope I may call myself her friend."

"I hope you may — and her husband's friend, too; for he is one of the finest fellows I know: and do you know, Warton, I don't think he's a man to stand much nonsense, reverend though he be."

"But, Eastham, you really have no ground —"

"Very likely. I am quite sure there is no ground for fearing any harm. If I know anything of women I take our reverend friend's wife to be a regular trump; a fine, good-hearted woman, without a bit of evil in her, or a grain of rubbishy sentiment and mad French nonsense. I take it that she is as safe as the Bank of England. I don't mean to say there is the slightest danger of anything but ill-natured and silly people getting up a talk, which you know very well they would do fast enough; and I tell you, Warton, frankly, that I think you have no right to give the slightest reason for such a talk. These are good and simple people. They have brains enough in literary ways and that — I wish I had as much — but he is not a man of the world, and she is not a woman of the world. They have not been much in the sort of atmosphere of smoke and gas and midnight, and that

kind of thing, that some of us are rather too well accustomed to. They seem to take it for granted that every man means well, and is a gentleman in their sense — which, I suppose, is the true sense; and pray let not either of us undeceive them.”

“An interesting lecture, Captain Eastham, and very edifying. Your moral philosophy, however, is quite thrown away on me. I hope I know how to conduct myself like a gentleman.”

“I hope so too,” said Eastham calmly and gravely.

“Do you mean this to be an insult, Eastham?” asked Warton, in a low hoarse tone, all the blood he had rushing to his pale cheeks. He writhed, Democrat and Working Man though he boasted himself, at the slightest word which seemed to cast a doubt on his full title to the rank of gentleman.

Eastham saw his anger, and was sorry to have offended him, especially by harping on such a string. Perhaps if Warton had come of a noble house, the warm-hearted young Tory might have given an angry answer; but as it was he feared that he had hurt the feelings of his companion in an unmanly and illegitimate way; and he hastened to make atonement.

“Indeed I don’t, old fellow; and I should be sorry to say a word to annoy you. I know as well as anybody can that you are incapable of anything that is not honourable and manly, and I hope I have not conveyed any other idea. But you know how much better

lookers-on can judge of the effect of most things than the performers; and I thought it would be as well to give you a hint that you seemed rather more attentive to Mrs. Alwyn than perhaps might seem satisfactory to suspicious eyes. One can't be too careful, you know — and both you and I think too well of these people to do anything which could possibly annoy or offend them. That's all. I didn't mean to deliver you a lecture on morals, which you don't want, and I am not, perhaps, exactly qualified to give."

"Thanks. I am really much obliged to you Eastham; and perhaps you are quite right. I need not tell you, I hope, that I had not the least idea I was giving cause for any suspicion whatever. I have the warmest friendship for Myra Alwyn; she seems a woman capable of understanding a man, — in that fact alone a rare phenomenon, Eastham; and I did not suppose it possible that anybody could put a false construction upon a frank and avowed friendship, even though between a man and a woman. I am glad to think that *she* never did — she is far too true and pure for that. But your hint is doubtless a wise one in a worldly point of view — just the point of view I am too apt to ignore; and you may be sure I will pay attention to it."

The present impression upon Captain Eastham's mind was that all this was rather too meek and innocent and eloquent. But he was ashamed to entertain even a momentary suspicion of his friend's sincerity;

and he set the protestations of innocence down to the score of Warton's habits as a teacher of the masses.

So the subject dropped; but Warton did not forget what had been said, and part of it only confirmed a suspicion which had always been rankling at his heart, that his Tory friends and patrons never forgot his origin — never regarded him quite as one of themselves; that to them he was the educated working man's son, to be patronised and treated kindly because of his talents and his services: but nothing more.

Regarding the immediate subject of the conversation, he resolved of course to be cautious. He could not afford just now to do anything which might displease Eastham, on whose friendship and energy he especially relied; but Captain Eastham had far better have said nothing about the matter. For Warton, who could never believe in the possibility of anyone talking "right out" on any subject, speaking from his heart all he had to say without reserve or *arrière-pensée*, at once concluded that Eastham had observed much more than he acknowledged. In fact, he assumed that Eastham, keen-eyed, well trained in the world's ways, not unskilled in reading the thoughts and hearts of women, had seen in Mrs. Alwyn's manner something that made him fear for her if brought too much within the sphere of Warton's influence. A hideous flush of rapture filled Warton's heart. He was not a Tartuffe — was there ever a Tartuffe, any more than a Don Quixote,

in the real flesh? — and he did not know himself, or even suspect himself, to be a hypocrite; nor had he any set deliberate purpose of evil in his heart just now. But he was pleased to think of himself as one who had at last found the only being capable of appreciating him, and whose fate he held in his hands. He loved to play with fire, to gaze across the limits of the unlawful. His passion of vanity was flattered and intoxicated as much as his passion of love was roused; and he was dangerous now even to himself. The animal courage which he ordinarily wanted was supplied now, for the time at least, by other emotions; and in his new excitement he would have rushed on danger, just as a timid man becomes reckless when fired by wine.

So, having resolved to be cautious, he nevertheless made every effort to throw himself in Mrs. Alwyn's way; and failing for a day or two, he boldly went to see her. An evil fortune favoured him — she was alone.

She was writing letters, and she did not particularly want to see him or anyone. Perhaps she least wished just then to see *him*. A vague instinct might possibly have already warned her; but she could assign to herself no clear reason for not seeing him. She thought it would be hard and unfriendly not to see him. So he was admitted, and she gave him a cordial welcome.

One of Myra's weaknesses, as we have already said, was a love of brilliant dressing. She was quite conscious of her attractiveness, she knew there was beauty in her dark gleaming eyes, her thick dark hair, her white skin, her delicate hands, her small but full figure. She liked to adorn herself and admire herself; she never wished to be for a moment in dishabille; it is doubtful even if Dr. Alwyn ever saw her in anything more negligent than an artistic negligence. This particular day she wore a morning dress of studied carelessness; of some rich material or other, amber in hue and delightfully flowing in folds, and fastened in front with a jewelled brooch that sent out a myriad sparkles at every motion of the wearer. There was a sense of that profusion about her which, according to Mary Wortley Montagu, enhances so much the charms of beauty. She really did look very graceful and fascinating; and Warton's eyes lighted up as he looked upon her. There was something strange about his expression as her eyes met his; something which she afterwards remembered sent an uncomfortable sensation through her; but it was dispelled in a moment, and for the time forgotten.

"I have disturbed you," said Warton; "but I hope you will forgive me."

"No — not disturbed me; at least I can finish what I was doing at any time. I expect Dr. Alwyn home in a few minutes."

"Indeed!" The word was spoken with studied carelessness, to convey the impression that Warton had almost forgotten Dr. Alwyn's existence. "I have not seen you for days, Mrs. Alwyn; and I am returning to town very soon — perhaps to-morrow; and I could not leave without seeing *you*."

"But you are coming again? We shall often see you down in this region? Especially if the people of Northinglen choose you for their representative, you will have to come this way often, to look after your constituents. They are very jealous people in this part of the world, Mr. Warton, and exact an immense amount of attention from their member of parliament, or their clergyman, or indeed anybody on whom they have the slightest claim."

"I am sorry for it. I do not wish to come here too often."

"Indeed? Then I advise you not to try to become member for Northinglen. O, you don't know what exacting creatures we are down here! Ask Dr. Alwyn — he knows."

"I sometimes wish I had not come here, Mrs. Alwyn. I sometimes think it was my evil star that lighted me this way."

"You don't fear to fail, surely? My husband says your chances are very good, and so does Captain Eastham. I really don't know much about electioneering affairs myself. I don't believe I ever took much in-

terest in any election before; but I am quite anxious about this, and I ask all sorts of people; and they tell me you have a great chance."

"Then you do really take so much interest in it?"

"Indeed I do, and so does Alwyn. I want you — *we* want you to succeed, and to find a proper field for your talents and an opening for your ambition. You are thrown away when not in parliament. Everybody says so."

"Your words are delightful to me. I care very little whether I win or lose if you take so much interest in my fortune. Mrs. Alwyn, I have always longed for human sympathy — for a woman's sympathy, such as you can give. How happy are they — they who, like your husband, can find it always! Some of us are less fortunate. Believe me, I feel your kind words deeply."

Mrs. Alwyn looked at him rather surprised. She became again uncomfortable, and would have been very glad indeed to hear her husband's step.

Warton had risen from his seat, and was leaning against the chimneypiece, gazing at her. She tried to put the personal question away.

"Do you know that I was just about beginning a letter to your niece, Mr. Warton, when you came in? I fear she finds me a bad correspondent. But it really is not my fault, and I am very fond of her."

"She is happy," replied Warton. "She loves *you*. But, indeed, who does not that has ever known you?"

This was rather too much. Mrs. Alwyn's colour heightened. The truth began to force itself upon her. She would fain have fought against it; but it came on irresistibly.

"On the contrary," she said coldly, "I am not at all much of a favourite, nor disposed to strong and sudden likings. May I ask you to touch the bell, Mr. Warton? I expect my husband, and I must give some directions."

"A moment — one moment, Mrs. Alwyn. I shall not see you soon again. I must not see you. O, forgive me, but I cannot recall what I have said, and I read in your eyes that you have understood it. I do not regret it; no, I am glad that you know it. Who could be near you, as I have been, and not feel to you as I feel?"

He endeavoured to take her hand, for she had risen from her seat the moment he began his speech, and was moving forward as if to touch the bell herself. She calmly drew her hand back — she was very angry, but perfectly self-possessed.

"Mr. Warton, I suppose it is in some way my fault that you have ventured to speak to me in this way. But I was quite unconscious — I am unconscious now — of having ever given you the slightest excuse for such an insult."

"It is indeed in no way your fault, except the fault that Heaven has visited you with, and which has made me so mad as to offend you. But you have too good a heart not to feel for me and forgive me."

"Allow me to pass, please; I have no right to hear any more of this."

"Stay, Mrs. Alwyn, one moment! I pray you hear me, and I will say nothing that even you may not hear. I came here to-day only to take leave of you — for ever. I did not mean to have spoken one word to betray my — my secret. But we must not part until you have forgiven me — until you say I am forgiven. What is my offence, except the indiscretion of speaking out what you must have known?"

"These words, Mr. Warton, are but another insult. I never knew, I never dreamed of such a thing. If I had done so, you should have had no chance of abusing my confidence in your truthfulness and your honour. There, we have had quite enough of this."

"But you will hear me — at least a word?"

"Then pray speak it quickly, and with as little of sentiment as may be. I am not romantic, Mr. Warton; and I fail to appreciate scenes of this kind."

"But you are a woman, Myra — pardon me, Mrs. Alwyn — and you know what creatures, what hapless creatures, we men are, and how we are the fools of sympathetic tones and kind looks. Think of what my life usually is — a blank, bare desert so far as love

and sympathy and affinity of intellect and heart are concerned; and think of what I saw, what I must have seen, in you: and then blame me as you will for my wild indiscretion; but forgive me for that which was my only fault. I ask pardon in the humblest way. Do not refuse it to me. Remember, as a Christian woman, how weak and easily betrayed we are all, all — the best of us."

There seemed to be sincerity and contrition in his tone, and the appeal to Myra as a Christian woman conscious of un-Christian weaknesses overcame her. She began to think that his worst fault was indeed, perhaps, that indiscreet confession of a feeling he could not banish. "Are we responsible for our secret emotions?" thought Myra; and a flush of conscience-driven crimson came over her cheeks. "Can we shut our hearts against every unbidden feeling? Shall we not be judged for what we say and do and sanction, not for the resisted, repelled, yet unconquerable feelings which invade our human hearts? Alas," she asked herself in that moment of sudden conflict, "is he any worse than I, except that he has allowed himself to be betrayed into speech? Shall I condemn him and expose his error? I, of all women in the world!"

So she spoke to him in gentle, not unkindly tone: "Mr. Warton, I am very, very sorry for all this. I am doubly sorry, because I fear it must have been in some way my fault. But I earnestly entreat you to

believe that I never knew — never suspected — anything of the kind. It is due to myself to say this, and to ask you to believe it. I am sure that you are now deeply sorry for what has happened; and I do believe, however wrongly you may have spoken, that you are too much a man of honour and a Christian ever to allude to this humiliating subject again. Let it be forgotten between us."

He waved his hand impatiently, but then let his eyes fall, and stood in an attitude of profound penitence. Womanlike, she felt a throb of pity for him, thus struggling with himself and thus humbled.

"Let it all be forgotten; and for my part, I forgive it. I cannot think I am doing wrong when I say that the unfortunate words you have spoken — and which I am sure you did not mean — shall be as if they were never said. Good-bye."

"Then we are still friends?" he said in hesitating tone.

"Still friends, I hope, Mr. Warton — at least not enemies."

She bowed, and did not put out her hand. But he seized it; and, before she could anticipate or prevent the action, he brought it to his lips. Not with passion or fervour, however — only respectfully and sadly. She could hardly resent the touch of his lips to her hand, so slight, so reverential was it. Indeed, there

was no time; for in that instant Warton left the room, and she stood alone by the hearth.

As Warton left the house, he saw Dr. Alwyn come riding up. He drew back, turned another way, and so avoided the meeting. Not that he had any sensitive or scrupulous objection to reciprocating a friendly grasp of Dr. Alwyn's hand. But he knew that to meet him would almost infallibly necessitate a return to the house, and perhaps a dinner there; and he would not on any consideration have spoiled in Myra's eyes the picturesque and dramatic effect of his sudden departure. Prose after that poetry would be, he thought, a most ruinous anti-climax.

For he left Myra's presence not repentant and despairing, but full of hope and confidence. He had deliberately applied a touchstone, and he considered the result satisfactory. The one thing in life which Warton could not believe in was the simple virtue of an intellectual woman. Of his wife's innocence he felt satisfied, because he knew her to be so quiet and stupid. But with intelligence and quick emotions always went, he thought, some symphony of irregular and unconquerable passion. And when Myra promised not to betray him, not to expose him, he read condonation, and even a faint and distant pledge of encouragement, in the promise. So, as he went, his way was lighted by a lustrous, lurid glow of passion; and he was ready to follow it whithersoever it might lead.

And Myra? She felt deeply grieved and humbled. She was sorry for him, whom she could no longer respect; she was sorry for herself, and ashamed; she almost shrank from her husband's clear, confident eyes, as if there were some shameful secret hidden from him, and to which she was a party.

But Dr. Alwyn came in that moment.

"Anything the matter, my little woman?" he asked. "You seem put out."

"Yes, I think I am a little put out, Alwyn dear. But it's nothing; and don't mind me, please."

"Well, I know that asking questions does not tend to put a woman in again if she happens to be put out. But come — just one question, and then I'll let you alone until you like to make me your confidant. Is it anything serious?"

"O, no, dear; nothing."

"Yet one other question —"

"Where is your promise? Broken already?" said Myra, trying to look pleasant.

"Well, just this one. Has anybody been here telling you any bad news?"

"No, dear; I have heard no news, good or bad. Somebody has been here, however — Mr. Warton."

She could not look up as she got out the words, slowly, and with a desperate effort to pronounce them carelessly.

"I knew that was Warton I saw leaving the house

just as I came up. I tried to signal him; but he didn't see me, and turned away. Why didn't he stay?"

"He seemed in haste; in fact he is going up to town very soon; and he only came to make a call."

"*He* has not been telling you any disagreeable news, Myra dear?"

"More questions, Alwyn? Again your pledge broken? Come, I must not be a party to such breaking of promises, and so I'll not answer you another word."

The assumed gaiety of her manner did not at all deceive her husband. He was generally that best and shrewdest of observers, an unsuspecting observer. He never brought foregone conclusions with him to spoil his powers of observation, and so he seldom went astray. But though he now saw as clearly as the day that something was wrong with his wife, and that that something was connected with Warton's visit, he had no more idea of suspecting her of concealing any secret of her own than he had of turning atheist. If he formed any conjecture at all, it was that Warton had been confiding to Myra some uncomfortable story connected with Warton's own household; some family difficulty or debt or dispute, or something of that kind. "She will tell me all about it presently," he said to himself; and he changed the subject. Perhaps he was

a little disappointed when, during the night, his wife avoided any further allusion to it.

Now it had not escaped the keen loving eyes of Dr. Alwyn that a sort of change had been lately coming over his wife. Probably no eyes save his alone could have seen it; but he saw it, and secretly sighed over it; and the thought of it raised up a new barrier between him and the completion of his Flora. For it often now happened that during even the rare hours left him by his outer duties for labour at his own loved and long-delayed task, he laid down his pen, and consumed his brief precious time in barren and melancholy thought. "She is not happy now; not so happy as she was:" thus ran the sad burden of his thoughts. He had noted a vaguely mournful and dissatisfied expression many times on her face; he had heard her answer in tones that showed how *distracte* she was; he had detected a querulous note in the voice that used to ring so musically and so cheerfully. Why was this? At first — for Dr. Alwyn was not quite a simpleton — he set all this down naturally and satisfactorily to a very hopeful cause, and knew that when wives become suddenly a little moody, fitful, and capricious, husbands are not always supposed to have reason to mourn over these symptoms. But months passed away, and this conjecture died blankly out; and Dr. Alwyn began sadly to think that he must ascribe Myra's melancholy to a very different cause. He began

to think that she sorrowed silently over the empty quiver, each week and month making the hope that it might some day be no longer empty fade more and more. Dr. Alwyn and his wife were now nearly three years married, and the laugh of an infant had not gladdened their home.

Did he never suspect that she began to find his love not enough for her — that she repented of her marriage with a man five-and-twenty years her senior? No; he had not suspected this. She met him now, as ever, with tenderness and affection; and his loyal manly soul was incapable of conceiving a suspicion — would have disdained to harbour it, even if it could have stolen its way in. That she should love him with the passion and glow wherewith a young wife meets a husband of years more nearly corresponding with her own, he did not expect. Let it be frankly owned, too, that few British men of Dr. Alwyn's age exactly want that sort of passionate love in a wife. They probably think such emotions irregular, unladylike, and un-English. Dr. Alwyn had nothing of the hero of romance about him; he was simply a good-hearted, manly, order-loving Briton. Our friend Shirley Brooks seems rather proud to tell us that the heroine of his *Sooner or Later*, being "a modest English girl," and not a French-woman, could never think of "flinging herself demonstratively on her husband's bosom and grappling him to her own, while she sobbed out a half-fierce, half-

tender demand to know what rival had come between her and his love." No, to be sure, that wouldn't be nice for a modest Englishwoman to do, would it? — that flinging herself on her husband's breast? Hardly proper, one might say. Some of us, of course, have natures not so well regulated; perhaps have a dash of some Celtic, or Oriental, or other fierce blood in our veins, and would like our wives all the better if, in some moment of doubt or fear or grief, they did thus fling themselves into our arms, and grapple us to their bosoms, and so forth. But it is only fair to say that Dr. Alwyn's ideas rather harmonised with those of Shirley Brooks, and he never expected to be suddenly grappled to his pretty young wife's bosom, nor did he feel called upon to do any such grappling business himself. Whereon we have only to remark — and of course the remark applies to the people in this story and to nobody else — that if Dr. Alwyn had this day of which we have been writing, or any previous day when he noticed distinctly the melancholy symptoms already described, just taken his young wife to his bosom, demonstratively and warmly, and put to her "the half-fierce, half-tender demand," she would assuredly have burst into tears, have disburdened her mind of its secret, have shown him frankly and faithfully her whole heart, and have saved much mischief — averted, perhaps, at least one calamity.

No word, however, was spoken which could have

led to such a revelation. Myra brightened up during the evening, and came to think less of what had happened that day; and Dr. Alwyn made up his mind to the belief that after all nothing very particular could have occurred — only, of course, he was a little sorry that his wife did not tell him all about it, whatever it might have been.

CHAPTER III.

On the Platform.

"I ONLY ask of you, my fellow Englishmen, that hearing which is not denied to the meanest criminal that ever quailed before the eye of justice."

So, in tones loud, thrilling, and passionate, Walter Warton adjured a throng of his friends and whilom patrons, the working men, and adjured them in vain. Redoubled hisses, hootings, and groanings followed every effort, every appeal made by him to obtain a hearing.

This was at a great meeting of the working men, for the most part electors of the borough Warton meant to contest. The expected vacancy had arrived, and Warton was fairly in the field a candidate — thus far the sole candidate. He hoped, indeed, by striking a strong and decisive blow in the beginning, to scare away any other competitor; and therefore he plunged at once at the heart of the constituency by calling together a mass-meeting of the working men. The meeting was held in a vast, drear, unadorned room, bare as a barn, resounding like a church — a temperance-hall generally, an electioneering arena at periods of parlia-

mentary crisis. The working men crammed the hall, and, to the utter amazement of Warton, greeted him when he came upon the platform with a perfect broadside of hisses and groans.

He came accompanied by a cluster of his friends. Captain Eastham, who was an elector for the borough, and was well known to everybody there, was his "best man." A whole dinner-party of Tory gentlemen from Eastham's were with him. Hamerfield, the Unitarian thinker, the philosophical Radical, who had Views of Life, and who happened to be spending a day or two at Eastham's, came too, having previously protested against being understood as identified by his presence with Warton's or anybody else's opinions — a protest rather superfluous, inasmuch as outside a select circle in London nobody had ever heard his name, or knew or cared anything about his opinions. Shortsighted, delicate of feature, awkward, nervous, Mr. Hamerfield peered about him through an eyeglass, and made philosophical observation of everything, as if he were an astronomer trying to deduce new laws from inspection of some distant star-clusters. Ralph Lennon, too, appeared on the platform with Warton; Lennon not thinking it worth while to make any protest about his opinions, and not caring a single rush what deductions anybody made from his presence there. He sat a little behind the foremost group, apparently quite listless and apathetic, but in reality following the whole proceedings

with close interest, and especially observant of Warton's demeanour.

Captain Eastham had been called on to preside, as an elector of the borough, one of the members for the county, very popular resident landlord, general favourite and good fellow. He was received with much applause, and said a few manly, hearty words, in which he invited a hearing for his distinguished and gifted friend — the friend of the working man, the true Englishman, the admired popular orator — Mr. Walter Raleigh Warton.

Except for the one ominous burst of hisses, there had been yet no token of public dissatisfaction with the friend of the working man, the true Englishman, and admired popular orator. Captain Eastham was about to invite with graceful gesture the popular orator to come forward, when a stentorian voice called from the back of the hall, "Captain Eastham!"

There was a dead silence. The gallant Captain came to the front, and indicated that he was ready to hear anything the Stentor wished to say.

"Captain Eastham, you're a Tory, ain't you?"

"I think my friends and neighbours here all know my political opinions pretty well. I have never concealed them. I am a Tory to the backbone!"

Some hisses began, which however the mass of the meeting drowned in encouraging cheers. The working

men liked the Tory to be a Tory and to say so. But the catechist went on:

"Then is your friend Mr. Warton a Tory to the backbone too?" (Shouts of laughter and uproarious cheers.) "Because, if he is, he needn't take the trouble to make any speech here. We don't want him."

Tremendous applause followed this hit, and stormy laughter.

Captain Eastham smiled, and tried to recover his ground:

"My friend Mr. Warton is much better able to explain his political opinions than I can pretend to be. I should have thought you all knew him too well to require any explanation. I thought most English working men knew Walter Raleigh Warton."

"Yes, we know him *now*; we've found him out at last," roared Stentor; and new vociferations followed.

"This," continued Eastham, "is not a time for disunion, nor for squabbles about names of Tory or Radical. Our country is in danger; and to the enemy who threatens us we should stand shoulder to shoulder, not as Whigs and Tories, but as Englishmen. I have not asked my friend whether he shares my party opinions or not."

"Who's paying his expenses?" clamoured a new voice; and dire confusion set in.

"Captain Eastham!" again, at the first pause, yelled the original inquirer.

"Sir," replied the Captain, bowing politely to his wearisome questioner.

"Don't you think you've said enough now, Captain? Sit down, that's a good fellow, and let your friend speak for himself."

And Captain Eastham, thinking the advice on the whole very sensible and good advice, did resume his seat, after a few words of spirited but futile appeal on behalf of the abstract cause of fair play.

Thus far Warton had remained quietly sitting near Captain Eastham's presidential chair, calmly and blandly surveying the audience, and in his heart rather pitying poor Eastham for not being able to make anything of a popular meeting.

Warton quite enjoyed the prospect before him. He had immense faith in his own rhetorical powers, and revelled in the anticipation of a brilliant battle alone against tremendous odds; to be followed, as he felt convinced it must be, by a splendid victory. His pulses beat quickly, and the blood danced racily through his veins in joyous expectation of the coming struggle between eloquence and numbers. He had talked over many a vehement meeting before, and turned hisses into hurrahs, and partisan foes into passionate admirers. His oratorical quiver was always richly filled with those dazzling arrowy commonplaces which have such

a faculty for hitting the average intellect or heart fair in the bull's-eye, and which, even when they fail to hit the mark, leave at least, like the arrow of Acestes in the *Æneid*, their sparkles of light behind them.

So he was quite pleased that the meeting should be allowed to ferment up a good deal before he came forward to speak. He only wished that Myra Alwyn could be safely seated somewhere in the hall, that she might see him go into the battle and singly carry all before him.

"The meeting seems rather turbulent, does it not?" whispered Hamerfield, leaning across to Warton, behind the back of the yet contending Eastham. "What will you do if they won't listen to you?"

"O, I'll prevail on them to listen to me, never fear!" was the calm and confident answer.

"Seem a very rough class of persons, Mr. Lennon, don't they?" said the philosopher, addressing his neighbour on the other side. "Now do you really think it would be quite statesmanlike to intrust the government of a country into the hands of such a class?"

"I think it would be a very wrong thing indeed," calmly responded Lennon; "but it is a comfort to know that nobody ever proposed to do it; and I don't suppose these men here could spare the time to govern the country, even if we asked them."

"No, of course, I don't mean that; but when I

“speak of government I mean the domination of a homogeneous majority. Don't you think a well-adjusted balance —”

“Yes; but when the man behind the counter keeps the adjusting of the balance all to himself, the outsiders are not always quite convinced of its correctness.”

“Now then, Warton, I've had enough of it,” said Eastham, as he fell back from the front. “There are some determined bawlers there, I can tell you. I've had my eye on some of them. The meeting is packed, I think; but go ahead.”

“Give them fits, Warton,” ejaculated one of Eastham's military guests encouragingly.

The time had come. Warton rose slowly gracefully, from his seat, bowed, flashed a rapid glance around the hall from side to side, and then advanced to the front of the platform. He always made it a point to look his audience steadily in the face before he began. Thus his quick eye was enabled to read in theirs a lesson which guided him in the choice of the tone he should take. He saw at once that there was something in what Eastham had said. The meeting was all against him, and was boisterously in earnest; but scattered through the crowd, here and there, he saw faces with a peculiarly deliberate and business-like expression on them, as of men who had come to do a certain prescribed work, and who simply meant to do it. He saw many familiar faces too — faces of old

friends and admirers in fustian jackets — faces that now looked most sternly at him. His heart a little sank.

“This will be a tough business,” he thought within himself.

“Three cheers for Walter Raleigh Warton!” cried the gallant Eastham, springing up and waving his hat.

Acclamation of well-meant vigour began among the group on the platform, but was literally swept away and drowned in a tempest and deluge of groans and hisses. Walter Warton waited calmly until the storm died away and then began, with the old claptrap formula that had called up so many a cheer,

“Fellow Englishmen! fellow working men!”

His clear, powerful, thrilling voice made these words soar over all clamour, and penetrate the farthest part of the hall. He had a magnificent voice, that was certain; and, like Gretchen's beauty, it was his undoing. But the words had hardly escaped his lips when the tornado of groaning, hissing, yelling, stamping, thumping with sticks, set in again, and it would be hopeless for any organ of human mould to prevail above such a Babel of sound. Warton's lungs were not so good as his voice, and he always endeavoured not to overwork them. So he let the torrent sweep by, waiting quietly for his opportunity, and then began again — the same formula, evoking the same result. His words were a spell to bring down the thunder. Then, when

he got the chance, he tried the appeal which opens this chapter, and it had no better effect. The faint and feeble sound which the best combination of cheering on the part of his friends on the platform could produce was hardly distinguishable, even in Warton's ears, from the storm of indignant vociferation that beat upon him in front.

"Don't give in, Warton," cried Eastham. "Take it coolly. Let them tire themselves out."

"Some of the fellows are getting hoarse already, confound them!" said one of his friends.

But the Fabian policy was of no avail here. The "meeting" husbanded its lungs whenever the orator did. When Warton stopped, the audience — if one may use such a word of a mass of persons who were determined not to hear — stopped too. If Warton had been a conductor presiding, baton in hand, over a well-trained orchestra, he could not more effectively have dictated sound and silence in alternations than he did by first trying to speak and then for a moment remaining silent.

"The thing is all organised," said Eastham. "It's as clear as light."

Ralph thought it was too, and could not help conjecturing that he knew the name of the chief organiser.

Warton was quite cool as yet, and held well in

hand the reins of his self-control. He turned calmly to his friends.

"There's no earthly hope of tiring these fellows out," he said; "the thing is all pre-arranged. I must try another plan."

Then he came to the front of the platform again, and fairly went at his speech, the tumult setting in at once with vehemence as uproarious as ever. But he went on declaiming, gesticulating with all the fluent force and ease of one who is carrying with him a captivated and sympathetic audience. He was, in fact, now trying his last chance. There are times when it is hopeless to attempt tiring out a hostile audience. This was such a time. When it becomes clear that the moment the orator stops to take breath his foes will stop to take breath too, and that therefore their noise is not the mere inarticulate expression of fury, but the arranged and systematised mechanism employed for the express purpose of preventing him from being heard, then no experienced declaimer will think any longer of tiring out his tormentors. But there may be another chance for him. If he be really a distinguished speaker, a man of name and mark, whom people are curious to hear, he had better stream away with his speech, talking any rubbish he likes for the moment, and keeping the real oration back in readiness; and the chances are that many, or most, of his enemies will think they may as well hear a little of the orator if he positively

is determined to have his speech out. To prevent him from talking at all is, of course, the great thing; but if he actually is talking, and will talk, why, it seems a kind of pity, doesn't it, that one should not, even for curiosity's sake, hear a little of it? One appears to be, in a sort of way, losing the value of his time and money if he lets so much fine talking run right away and catches none of it. It is almost as great a temptation to a crowd as to see a beer-barrel burst in the street, and all the good liquor come streaming and foaming from the bung.

So Walter Warton declaimed away, striving no more to be heard above louder roarings than those which Demosthenes made the accompaniment of his sea-shore rehearsals. He talked away, unheeding all the noise. Sometimes through the storm a fragment of resonant sentence was drifted across the ears of Eastham and the group around him.

"Gad, it's a pity they won't listen or let us hear," said one of the party; "he's making a splendid speech." He was, in reality, talking the merest rubbish; revelling in absolutely unmeaning rhetoric. In fact, he was keeping the real speech until there should be some chance of its being listened to. Now could only be heard occasional scraps about England's hereditary glory and the malignant malice of an envious foe, and the imperative necessity of locking our shields, and

rallying round the ancient standard of the Commonwealth of Britain.

But Warton's plan seemed wholly unavailing. If any momentary lull took place, deluding him into the hope that he might really begin *the* speech after all, some commanding voices at once resumed the cry, and the obedient clamour of a thousand throats combined in full volume again. Warton was getting wearied; and, what was worse, he was losing his temper and becoming savage. Great beads of perspiration stood upon his white forehead, and after every sentence he bit his lips and set his teeth hard. He began to feel that he was being defeated, in full sight of the friends he had gathered round him to see his victory. The verdict of that meeting he knew would be fatal — a literal sentence of death to his hopes of the election; but it was not that he now cared most about. It was the success of the immediate struggle in which he was now engaged. In that supreme moment he would have bought a victory over that brute inarticulate force of opposition at any sacrifice man could make.

Several times Captain Eastham jumped to his feet and claimed the exercise of his supremacy as chairman. He was always received with cheers and laughter, and good-humouredly allowed to say his few words of vain appeal; but then *da capo*. The storm set in as fresh as ever.

"Gad, I never saw such scoundrels," he exclaimed,

as he resumed his chair of dignity, and wiped his forehead.

"Lots of them have sticks too," said one of his friends. "Shouldn't wonder if there was an awful row here presently."

"I'd run the risk for the chance of smashing a few of the fellows' heads," mildly and very sincerely remarked another.

"Can't we have in the police?" suggested Mr. Hamerfield.

"Police? Nonsense!" laughed Eastham, who, in all his anger, rather enjoyed the affair; "what could half-a-dozen blue-coats do there? Besides, I suppose the blackguards are only exercising what they consider their constitutional rights as free British citizens."

"What care these roarers for the name of king?" placidly observed Lennon.

"It's no use, Warton," called the chairman to his struggling and now angry friend; "keep your breath, old fellow. Cicero couldn't do anything here. Give up — and shut up."

"Never!" screamed Warton, now excited to a kind of frenzy; "they shall hear me, if I stayed here all night."

The words which had broken into a shrill falsetto, pierced, rather unluckily, the ears of the crowd, and excited a wilder outburst of fury. "Pull him off the platform!" "Have him out!" "Turn him out!" "Pitch

him into the street!" and other fierce cries, came from some of the mob behind, and soon began to have their effect on those in front; for some of them began to jump from their seats and flourish sticks and fists in alarming nearness to the platform.

"O, there will be a fight," cried Hamerfield, turning pale as a ghost, and jumping up.

"Sit still, damn it! sit still," called out Eastham. "Don't show the white feather, unless you want them really to knock your brains out. — Don't be afraid, Warton. Pitch it strong into them, as you are at it."

Warton, however, was very pale. Most of Eastham's friends, stout young soldiers, sat like graven images, apparently as little disturbed by the menacing appearance of the crowd as if it were made up of school-girls.

Lennon happened to be the nearest to Warton, just a little behind. He watched very closely the looks of a few of the most demonstrative and fierce who were in the front of the crowd below.

"You had better finish," he said in a low tone to Warton. "There's nothing to be done here, and the sooner we effect a dignified retreat the better."

But Warton heard nothing, and in any case would not have heeded. The conflicting passions of rage and fear were maddening him. He shrieked and gesticulated at the crowd, and flung defiance and frantic denuncia-

tion at them. Suddenly one man mounted a stool and sprang right on to the platform, like the leader of a storming-party mounting a wall. Another, another, and another were following; and in half a moment a whole surge would have swept over the platform. But exactly at the critical moment Lennon leaped to his feet, and seizing the leader fairly by the shoulders, pitched him off the platform back on the heads of his followers, who tumbled beneath him to the floor, where they floundered and blindly scuffled with each other. Then Lennon stood in front of the platform coolly and good-humouredly, confronting the crowd amid the wild hurrahs of the young warriors behind him, who all leaped to their feet and waved their hats.

The moment was critical. Peace or war? riot or reconciliation? The decision was proclaimed in a moment by a spontaneous and universal outburst of Homeric laughter, and hurrahs as of jubilant Northern hero-gods. The crowd was at bottom thoroughly good-natured and manly, and meant nothing worse than the stopping-up of Warton's rhetoric. They were immensely delighted with the pluck of the little knot of swells on the platform, and with Lennon's unexpected feat, and they cheered the hero and chaffed the overthrown besiegers with equal zest.

But when Lennon sprang to his feet, Captain Eastham leaped up too, for a different purpose. Lennon threw off Warton's assailant; Eastham caught Warton

in his arms. Warton had fainted; fainted, and would have fallen back on the platform, but that his quick friend caught him. In a moment the fact became known, and all was wild confusion. There were the usual cries for air and shouts for a doctor, and wild asseverations of "He's dead!" "No, he isn't!" "Yes, he is!" and so forth. At last two or three of his friends lifted him into the room behind the platform, while the others kept the crowd from pressing on. So he got air, and water was poured on him, and a doctor was sent for; but before this latter came Warton had opened his eyes and recovered his senses if not his strength.

"The excitement was too much for him," whispered Hamerfield to one of the young officers. "He is evidently of a highly nervous temperament. So am I."

"Funked, sir!" was the decisive answer of the warrior. "I saw it in his eye."

Warton was put into Eastham's carriage. Hamerfield and Eastham accompanied him. The rest of their friends had a drag. Lennon was nowhere to be seen. As soon as he had spoken to Warton and assured himself that the latter was all right again, he disappeared.

So ended the meeting which was to have made Warton's game. "Yes, I'm better now, Eastham, thank you," said Warton, in answer to an inquiry, as

they drove away. "I am quite well, in fact. But I have lost the day; I have kicked down the ladder on which I meant to climb." And he sank into profound silence.

CHAPTER IV.

Double Defeat.

FOR several days after the meeting and his signal defeat, Warton remained in a state of alternate excitement and depression. He sometimes astonished Eastham and the guests at Eastham's house by his reckless vivacity, and sometimes amazed them quite as much by his fits of despondency and silence. He drank wine far more freely than he was accustomed to do; and he played cards at night, and lost money and plunged into debt for it, and was going on one night to lose more and more, until Eastham positively interposed and would not allow it. His host set down his unusual excitement to the disturbance of his once promising election-prospects; but this was not the whole cause. The darker grew the horizon of his political hopes, the fiercer burned the fires of his passion for Myra Alwyn. Had he succeeded in his other projects, he might soon have forgotten her. But it was the law of his being to be always craving for new excitement; and when disappointment came from one quarter, his restless heart instinctively grasped after another kind of hope in another direction. Just now it seemed that all earth could afford him no compensation and con-

solation for what he had lost but that which Myra Alwyn's voice might promise him. He sickened at the thought of home, and Mabel and the children, and the debts and the placid poverty. Anything to escape that. Better by far utter destruction; better, at all events, any risk, any excitement.

He disappeared from Eastham's house for two or three days successively; at least he did not show himself to anybody between breakfast and dinner. Weary and haggard, he returned in time to dress and appear at table, where, as we have said, he drank largely, and exhibited extraordinary alternations of mood. In fact, each day he hurried across the country, on horse or foot, to the edge of the lake, and watched for Myra Alwyn. He would not go to her house, for he feared to meet her husband, and to have to endure a vapid and passionless conversation.

The fourth day he was successful. He saw her leave the house alone. Had she gone towards the town, he would have been intensely disappointed. But she did not. She turned the other way, as if to skirt the lake in the direction where Lennon's house and his abortive Phalanstery lay. She walked very slowly, and Warton kept her in sight till she had passed a branch of roads, after which the path lay straight before her, and there was no possibility of her deviating from it. Then he scrambled across some fields and ridges and rocks, so as to intercept her, that he might

not seem to have dogged her footsteps. When he had in full view that part of the road which she ought to have reached, he was surprised that he could not see her. At last he saw that she had seated herself on a little flower-grown rock or mound by the roadside overlooking the lake. These roads were to Myra as safe as Regent-street — nay, far safer. She walked or rode or lingered anywhere she pleased among the honest Cumberland folk without needing escort or provoking remark. She sat there idly, unconscious of the nearness of any observer. Her head was turned away from Warton, and he could only see her dark hair escaping from under her hat, and the curve of her neck as she looked round to the water, and the light-coloured drapery that she wore. Her attitude was listless, and one might say melancholy. Warton stood for a while and gazed at her. The whole scene and the seated solitary figure were strangely suggestive of melancholy, and struck mournfully on the eyes and heart of the ruined man. The day was heavy, oppressive, and hot; the air was charged and surcharged with electricity. Within the last few minutes great masses of thunder-cloud were gathering in the sky. The surface of the lake had a pallid, leaden, and ghastly hue. The cry of a wild-bird, as it flew across the mirror of the pale water, was the only sound that broke the funereal silence. Warton looked from earth to sky, and from sky to lake, and welcomed grimly the monotonous

melancholy with which Nature seemed to sanction his own mood. Then his eyes rested again upon the one figure; and the meanness of his nature became almost idealised and made sublime by the force of the passion which in a moment filled it. "I am nearly ruined," he grimly thought; "I have nothing left; but I would welcome, not ruin — *that* I dread — but death, extinction, annihilation, if I could but believe that she, as she sits there, alone and sad, is thinking of me!"

He leaped from the little height on which he was standing, and called her name:

"Myra!"

Her head was turned away, and she did not hear. She still sat in the same attitude, gazing listlessly at the water, never thinking that she sat under the eyes of an observer; thinking of nothing less than of the man who was so near her, and whose shadow suddenly falling on her caused her to look up with a start. Something like alarm showed itself in her face when she saw Warton. He seemed excited and even wild in his demeanour. She was usually a fearless woman, but she did now cast an uneasy glance up and down the road, and saw that, save for her and him, it was a solitude.

"You did not expect to see me here, Mrs. Alwyn?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Warton; I thought you had

returned to town. I was just going to visit a few poor people along the road, but I don't think I shall go now; it looks ominous of rain or a storm, I think."

She rose from her seat.

"Don't go just yet. Pray, don't. I have been here these several days back — this is the fourth day — in the hope of meeting you. Myra, I must speak to you."

"The last time I saw you, Mr. Warton, you promised me — you pledged me your word — that you would never speak in such a manner again. Am I to learn that you cannot keep your word?"

"Yes; you are to learn it — if you will — for it is true. If I made such a promise, it was idle; I could not keep it. I love you, Myra Alwyn — I love you like a madman! I think I am going mad."

"I think you must be when you dare to speak to me in this way. Let me pass, Mr. Warton! Do not attempt to stop me."

"You shall not pass, Myra, just yet!"

"I spared you before, Mr. Warton. I will not do so any more. I will expose you to the contempt and anger you deserve. Let me pass!"

He stood resolutely between her and her way home. She was not nearly so brave now as she pretended to be; and he saw hesitation in her eyes, and mistook its meaning.

"Why do you speak to me, Myra, in that harsh

tone? Am I a robber? Am I a criminal? I love you, and I cannot help it. I would die for you — I would die with you delightedly. I wish the lightning that will flash soon from those clouds would kill us both. I do, indeed. Myra, can you not speak to me one kindly word — one word, to say you do not hate me? Look at me. I am a ruined man. My hopes are gone — my ambition is frustrated — my home is hateful to me. I am ruined. It would be idle, indeed, to seek the sympathy of many women on such grounds as these. They only care for success; but you are not like them, you can feel for me.”

“Mr. Warton, I did feel much sympathy with you, and friendly admiration for you, when I thought you were a man of honour and a Christian. Can you blame me if I feel differently now towards you?”

“But you are not a saint, thank Heaven! You are still a woman — too much of a woman to blame a man because he cannot help loving you. Do not think I did not struggle against this. I loved you from the first hour I sat by your side, when we only talked commonplaces, and I did not think we should ever meet again. But Fate has flung us together, and I yield to my destiny. No, Myra; you shall not go yet; not till I have relieved my soul by telling you all I feel.”

“Is there no use in appealing to your sense of honour?”

"None, none!"

He stamped his foot impatiently.

"Are you not a gentleman?"

He scanned her face eagerly to discover if this was only a taunt. No; it was an earnest, indignant appeal.

"Myra Alwyn, let *us* at least not talk cant. Do you think I do not understand your nature? Do you think I cannot see that you are dissatisfied with your life, as I am? You are not happy; *you* have not found your place; your life is like my own — an unsatisfied blank, a void."

"My life," she said calmly, "is far better and happier than I deserve. It has until now been free from insult; it has been free from any contact with meanness and dishonour and wickedness. That must be my excuse for not having understood more readily the nature of a friendship like yours."

"Friendship between you and me! Folly! You did not believe it — you could not have believed it. I would sacrifice all the friends on earth for one warm word from you. Come, Mrs. Alwyn; you are, after all, a woman, with a woman's heart. You are young and beautiful, and — it is idle to deny it — unhappy. No, don't deny it. I saw it in your very attitude just now. You do not condemn me in your heart because I have been drawn towards you and

love you. I mean you no harm. I would kill myself rather than injure you or offend you."

"All this rhapsody, Mr. Warton, is thrown away on me. It does not even impose upon me; it only offends and humiliates me. Please to let me pass."

"No, I cannot — I will not! This may be my last opportunity of seeing you face to face. You must not leave this place, Myra, until at least you have spoken some word of pardon and sympathy — yes, and of hope."

He seized her hand. She gave a sudden scream of alarm, and indeed of pain; for his grasp was sharp and fierce. He covered her hand with kisses. She literally tore it from him. The dainty fingers were circled with many sparkling rings; and as she forced her hand from his, bright blood-drops trickled down, starting from the flesh which was lacerated in the struggle between his fierce pressure and her vehement resistance.

"Let me go," she said, her courage rising, like that of all high natures, once the moment of trial had actually come. "I don't fear you in the least; I only feared *for* you when I thought you had yet something good in you. I hate and scorn you! No words of mine could express what I feel. You are a hypocrite and a coward, and everyone shall know it. I hear footsteps, thank Heaven! and I will ask the protection

of the first man that comes this way, and denounce you to him."

Warton knew now that she was in earnest. He stood motionless, torn internally by anger, disappointment, and love. He too heard footsteps: a moment and someone must come round the sharp curve of the road and appear in sight. Then, would she really dare to carry out her threat and make a scene and expose him? He would have escaped — literally fled — if there were any use in so base an expedient. As it was he stood at bay, his heart throbbing, his eyes riveted on the curve of the road.

And she stood resolute, with clenched fingers and sparkling eyes and pale cheeks — a pretty picture for anyone who could just then have appreciated its artistic points, but one which Warton did not venture to look on.

In a moment a man's figure showed itself at the curve of the road, and Ralph Lennon lounged slowly on. His eyes were on the ground.

Both Warton and Myra instinctively started and turned away. Warton was about to say, "For God's sake spare me this!" when his eyes fell upon her, and the words died on his lips. For he saw that her figure, her attitude, her hands had relaxed, and that her cheeks were covered with burning blushes. Then she began to walk rapidly, though with uncertain step, in the direction of her home. Warton walked unforbidden

by her side; his teeth were set hard, and he spoke not a word. They reached the junction of the roads, one of which branched towards Dr. Alwyn's; and they took that way. They still walked side by side. At last she looked back. Lennon had passed on the other way. They were again alone; but her house was now in sight. She then stood still and looked at Warton; but there was not the same resolution in her tone as she spoke to him now.

"I have spared you a second time — perhaps I have again done wrong; but do not this time misunderstand my motive. I detest, I despise you."

"I do not misunderstand your motive," replied Warton, in a slow undertone of bitterness and deep passion. "I understand it now only too well. I saw it in your cheeks and in your eyes when he, Lennon, came near! Yes, I knew well before this that you were unhappy, but I did not see to the bottom of your heart, and find the cause there. Perhaps I suspected this too; but now I know it. Will you give me your hand in parting, Myra?"

"No," she exclaimed passionately; "your last calumny is worse than all:" and tears flashed up in her eyes. "What have I done to you, Mr. Warton, that you thus persecute and insult me?"

He still stood between her and her house; and the place, which was in one sense a protection to her, was in another way a sort of immunity to Warton. He

knew she would hardly make a scene under the eyes and windows of her own house, and he therefore ventured quietly to detain her. But his manner was quite changed; he spoke with no vehemence now.

“Myra, you have destroyed me; only that! You have given me Fate’s final blow. But, believe me, I am not so wholly bad as you think me. I am not incapable of sympathy and of respect. We are both unfortunate; only I know from what I have now seen that you resist your temptation and will conquer it, while I have yielded to mine and betrayed myself, and lost even your respect. One word: keep my secret, as I will yours. Since an evil fortune has thus flung us together, and thus exposed one to the other, let us at least not betray each other. Good-bye. I don’t ask you any more to forgive me, and you will not ask me to forget you.”

He withdrew from her path, and without speaking a word she passed on. It need hardly be said that she did not look behind. He remained motionless for a while, and gazed fixedly after her; then he lifted his hand into the air, as if he waved with the gesture a sort of farewell to the place and its associations and hopes, and he took rapidly the road that led to the town. Soon the storm which had been threatening so long broke into thunder and flame, and drenching rain shrouded the lake and the whole scene in a curtain of mist. He took refuge in a small hotel or tavern, the

first that presented itself. Thence he wrote and despatched a note to Eastham, announcing that he had received some sudden news which obliged him at once to return to town, asking that his luggage might be sent on, and apologising briefly for his hasty and unceremonious departure.

"And so all that chapter closes," he bitterly thought. "I may bid farewell to hopes of any kind there. My career is done. Debt and difficulty now swallow me up. One chance only is left — if that fails I don't care what fate does with me."

In fact Walter Warton accepted one defeat at least: he gave up the idea of contesting the borough of Northinglen. His friends frankly told him it was hopeless; and he submitted to what he called fate.

CHAPTER V.

Sudden Hope — Sudden Disappointment.

Two women — the same two who watched and waited for Mr. Warton in an early chapter of this story — watched and waited for him in the same place now. But with one of them at least a change had taken place — a change so profound and organic that she seemed to herself not merely to stand upon the threshold of a new life, but to approach it a new being. In all the world that lay under the stars that summer evening it is doubtful if any heart swelled with a deeper, more thrilling, more fearful joy than the heart of Grace Ethelstone.

She had hidden herself the greater part of the day, to be alone with her happiness — to get accustomed to it — to become able to bear its effulgence — to school herself down, that she might not burst into wild raptures about it — to learn to regard it as real — to learn how to conquer the fears and doubts which its very brightness brought with it. Since Jupiter consented to gratify Semele by appearing in all the radiant joy of his celestial presence, and destroyed the poor little fond mortal, human creatures seldom hear of the

approach of a great happiness without some doubt and fear. Behind happiness treads always its shadow.

Grace Ethelstone had received that morning a letter from Ralph Lennon. He had cast the die; and the principal part of the letter ran thus:

“Can you, then, love me? and will you marry me? I come straight to the question — to me a most momentous one. I write that you may calmly and alone think over it, and ask your own heart, and obey its answer. I would not take you by surprise, or pain you, or persecute you; but if you could love me, Grace, I think I could make you happy. I am nearly twice your age, very likely: and what I am, you see; and I have beaten about the world too much to have a great deal of the bloom of life left on me. I was a digger in Australia when you were hardly out of your cradle, and I had lived many lives even before that, and have since; and with all my experience I have learned nothing of myself or of others that is half so precious and full of hope to me now as the conviction — yes, indeed, the conviction — that if you can love me, I can make you happy. Will you have me?

“I will come to London and see you the day after you receive this. That time will be long enough, I hope, for you to determine, and long enough for me to remain in suspense. And I would ask you not to speak of this to anyone until you have seen me. I

want your own decision, Grace, and no one else's. If you can love me, that is all."

Now this was not a love-letter in the ordinary style. It contained no impassioned words. It was not the language in which a young man pours out to his sweetheart his burning hyperbolical passion. Strangely enough, it did not contain one single protestation of Lennon's own love. Yet Grace hoped and believed that she perfectly understood it. Lennon wrote under the impression that his love for her was transparent, and not to be doubted. She thought she could see in it, too, the evidence of that proud and sensitive nature which she knew him to possess — that nature which disdains hyperbole as much as it scorns to hide its own supposed demerits or disadvantages. Not even for his love would Lennon condescend to the cajolery of mere words. His soul shone in the letter. "I love you, as you know by my asking you to love me:" there was the whole.

So she felt as she kissed the letter, and shed warm tears over it, and thought every sentence of it opened up a heaven over her life which hitherto had been so dull and hopeless. Yesterday, she was a poor girl, living the dreariest and most monotonous of existences; feeding on her own heart — a lonely atom in the universe. Now, she was a woman, loved, and passionately loving; offered happiness by one with whom she would have gladly encountered even misery. She

could only hide herself away, while she strove to grow familiar with the reality.

Doubts there were, of course. Could she make him happy? He was a scholar; a thinking man, who had seen life in many shapes — had wandered, and struggled, and suffered; and whose mind had ranged through a whole zodiac of experiences — of books, of nature, of life, of thought. Could she be a companion to him? Could her thoughts and ways have any interest for him? Could she read his books, and follow his ideas? Might he not come to be sorry in the end that he had ever married her? Might he not grow tired of her, and find her dull, and wish he had married someone better, or remained unmarried?

But she answered all this firmly and decisively. No; it was impossible. If Ralph Lennon loved her now he would love her always. She was already to herself an authority and a dogmatist on love. On this one subject she was inspired and infallible: as the young mother who was at school the year before last, and whose first baby was born a week ago, is already convinced that she understands from first to last, and with a knowledge not to be borne down by any authority, the whole science and practice of the management of infancy.

No, Grace had nothing to consider; she wanted no hours for reflection — reflection was over and done. If Ralph Lennon stood there just now she could only

fling herself into his arms. She was too much in love to think of any of the coqueties of courtship; and — let us do justice to her and to him as well — she never once bestowed a thought upon the fact that she was poor and that he was rich. She totally forgot his money and her poverty. It never would have occurred to her to think that he cared whether she was poor or rich.

So she only waited for him to come to give her answer. She did not dare yet to trust herself to talk to Mabel Warton upon any subject; indeed her cheeks and eyes just now were very red, and she had not Sophy Streatfield's delightful art of crying without disfiguring herself. She felt some remorse about hiding half the day from her aunt and the children; but she could not go into the light just yet. She heard little Watty's voice calling for her all over the house; but she made no answer. At last he came and hammered lustily at the door. For a while she remained quiet; but he continued to knock and call. "It is a shame," she thought, "to keep the poor little child there, and to disappoint him." So she opened the door, and Walter stormed into the room impetuous and excited.

"O, cousin Gracie, I didn't know where you were, and I do want you so much! O, look at my sword — do look at my sword! I've smashed the hilt right off it, and I can't mend it; can you? I've tried ever so

much and I can't mend it; and O, I am so sorry for my sword!"

Grace caught him in her arms, and lifted him up, and kissed him many times, and stammered out, half smiling, half sobbing:

"O, you dear little Watty, you shall have a sword twice as fine as this, and a gun, and a spear, and anything else you like; and you shall be as happy as a little king!"

Watty opened the eyes of wonder even more than of delight.

"But who'll give them to me, Gracie dear?"

The little man's simple knowledge of the resources of the family, and its limited power of conferring splendid gifts, was an honest and timely corrective of enthusiasm. Somehow Grace felt herself blushing and growing shame-faced at the straightforward inquiry.

"O, you'll see, Watty; somebody will give them."

"But I don't know," said Watty, still dubious — "I don't know, Gracie, who *could* give them. Papa isn't here, and nobody gives me anything but you and Mr. Lennon; and you told me yesterday you couldn't give me anything for a while; and it was a ship I asked Mr. Lennon to bring me, and not a sword."

"Yes; but some other time perhaps, you little unbelieving, practical, cross-questioning small boy: I promise you a fine sword; take my word for it. But in

the mean time let us see if we can't do anything to mend this murderous weapon you have got here."

The mending of the sword was accomplished somehow; a mangled matter at the best, it did not seem at all artistic or military to little Watty. But it gave Grace some time to collect her senses, and to pour the cold water of common duties upon the glowing fervour of her happiness.

Meanwhile Watty told his mamma how kind cousin Gracie was — that she had promised him a splendid sword, that she was mending his broken weapon, and that she cried when he told her it was broken.

"You silly boy, what nonsense!" said his mamma. "Cousin Grace cried because your little sword was broken! How could you get such a ridiculous idea into your head?"

"Why, but indeed mamma she did! She regularly burst out crying — not roaring, you know, as Maby sometimes does" — and Walter laughed at the absurdity of his own comparison — "but crying quietly. I saw the tears in her eyes and running down her cheeks too. Look, here she comes; ask her."

"Why, Grace, this little goose says you began to cry because his sword was broken!"

Grace laughed merrily at the idea. "No, not exactly for that; but —" and the tears came up and sparkled in her eyes again; and Mabel looked wistfully at her, but asked no more questions.

Evening came on at last, and it brought a calmer and more self-possessed mood to our happy girl. Mabel had been expecting Warton these two or three evenings, and felt convinced he must be coming now; and so they waited for him in the little garden in front of the house. There was no talk now, as there used to be, of going to the railway station to meet him. His comings had been of late so irregular and so rare that even Mabel had given up all habit of thus forming herself and her niece into a guard of honour to receive him and escort him home.

The two women walked up and down, while the children played on the grass. Grace felt unusually warm and tender to Mabel, whom she seemed now about to leave. She thought with the deepest pity of the poor, fond, weak woman whom she, hurrying to her own happiness and love, was to leave behind her to an ever-deepening shadow of difficulty or sorrow. She thought with a sensitiveness of penitence approaching to remorse that she had often been impatient or weary of Mabel's gentle ways and placid weakness; that she had often felt a contempt for her, and sometimes gone near to expressing it. Almost as one feels towards the dying, she felt to Mabel, whom she was about to leave behind; and she longed to throw her arms round her neck and kiss her, and beg to be forgiven for any chance impatience or passing ebullition of temper in the irrevocable days gone by.

They walked a few turns in silence. At last Mabel said:

"I don't know, Gracie, how it is; but I grow more and more anxious about Walter. He looks so thin and worn; and I am sure he has something very heavy on his mind. He will not talk about it to me, nor tell me anything if I ask him. He is so kind and considerate that he thinks it would pain me to hear of anything uncomfortable; and of course it would, dear; and you know how poor my nerves are, and always were, Grace, since I was a child. But I think it's so much worse when one isn't told, don't you? — for then one keeps imagining the most dreadful things."

"Well, dear, you know that Walter is very busy and anxious just now about his election, and all that; and men must feel excited and anxious about these things in a way that we perhaps can't understand. But that will be all settled soon."

"Yes; but I fear it's more than that. It's a terrible thing, Grace, to think that your husband has some secret weight upon his mind which you are to know nothing of. O, my dear, I hope you will never have to think and brood over such a thing. And a woman ought to know her husband's troubles. The Bible itself says she ought to be his helpmate; but O, Grace, I never think of the words without remembering that I am not my poor Walter's helpmate: I never was. It's not my fault; at least I can't do any better, for I don't

understand the things that occupy him. But I often, often think what a pity it is poor Walter ever saw me. He might have married some clever woman, who could have understood him and helped him on, and not been a mere drag and clog on him as I have been; or he might even have married some woman with money, and that would be something. Do you know, I sometimes think it would be a happy thing if I died now, while he is still young; for then he might find someone to marry him who could understand him and be a help to him."

"Dear Mabel, you must not think of such dreadful things. Surely nobody could be more attached to Walter than you are."

"No, indeed, nobody could; nobody on earth could be more attached to him than I am. But what good is that? A little dog would be fond of him too. A man wants something better than that: he wants his wife to be a companion and a helpmate."

Grace could hardly answer; indeed, she knew nothing to say which could have any soothing effect. She tried some weary old commonplace about the difference between men's and women's nature, and failed to get through with it. Mabel went on:

"I become so fearful too. I am always thinking that something will happen to him — that he will fall sick somewhere miles and miles away, and die, perhaps, before I see him. You remember poor Mrs.

Archdale, who lived in Crown Villa below? Her husband was away somewhere — in Dublin or Edinburgh, I think — and one day she got a telegram to say that he had died suddenly; and she had hardly recovered from the faint she fell into, when there came a letter by post from him, in his own handwriting, to say that he was coming home immediately, and was longing to see her, and that he was well and happy, and hoped to find her so. And it was such an agony, for in her bewilderment she thought at first that the telegram must be a mistake, until she remembered that it was despatched hours and hours after he had posted his letter; so she had only a second shock, and the knowledge of her misery twice over. And he was dead, sure enough. I often think something of the same kind will happen to poor Walter.”

“But, dear Mabel, Walter is not in bad health, and there is nothing at all to give you any uneasiness about him.”

“Do you really think so, Grace, or are you trying merely to allay my fears? Do you really think there is nothing very dreadful on his mind?”

“Indeed I think there is nothing very dreadful. I fancy he is in some little difficulty about money just now to meet his expenses; and I think it is such a pity he should place himself in any difficulty of the kind when he has so much talent, and ought to be independent of political parties and patrons. But I don’t

believe there is anything worse than that disturbing him — I don't indeed."

"I am glad to hear you say so — it comforts me. I do wish I could see him out of these dreadful money difficulties. I am ashamed to say it, Grace, but I look at every newspaper that comes in the hope of seeing an announcement of the death of that hideous old aunt of mine, that frightful old Jane Ethelstone — just because there is a faint possibility that she might leave me or the children a few thousand pounds. I don't think she will. I know she wouldn't give us a farthing; and I have not spoken to her or heard from her for years; but when people are dying they get softened sometimes, and perhaps she might think of me and the children."

Grace laughed at the remembrance of the fearful old person alluded to.

"I am quite sure she'll never leave *me* anything, Mabel; and indeed I shouldn't like to take a farthing of her wretched money. Let them sew it all up in a sack and bury it, and put a stone over it to say, 'Here lies the soul of Jane Ethelstone,' as they did with somebody in *Gil Blas*. I don't care. She detests me — she considers me a lost girl; she told me so when I boldly told her I meant to go to Rome and be an artist. She asked me sarcastically whether I would not become a ballet-dancer, or take to wearing trousers; and she wound up by saying that I was a disgrace to

my family, and I think she added to my sex; and she requested that when I became a sign-painter or a tomb-stone-cutter I would do her the favour to forget that I was a relative of hers — which I have been trying to do ever since.”

“Well, my dear, she is a very disagreeable old woman; but I could forgive her all if she just turned good-natured in the end, and left me something to help my poor Walter with. O, how glad I should be to give it to him, and to bring him out of all his vexations and troubles!”

“Now, Mabel, I am the first to be of good omen, and to bring you good news. Look up! Your alarms about Walter are over for one night at least — for see, here he comes.”

And so he did. Grace's eyes had discovered him a long way off. He was coming on with rapid strides. He looked dusty and weary. Mabel was already signalling him with waving hands. He nodded, and then turned his eyes downward again.

“Here's papa, Watty!” said Mrs. Warton joyfully to her little son.

“O,” said Watty, looking up, “shall I run to meet him, mamma?”

The child was rather doubtful, and not at all anxious. Papa came so seldom now, and played with Watty so little, that his presence had long ceased to create any storm of delight.

"Yes, dear, certainly."

But Watty began to make some disposition of his playthings before he started; and the result was that his papa was at the gate while the boy was still on the grass. Mabel threw herself into his arms. Walter brushed her cheek with his lips, and replaced her quietly on her feet. He also kissed the children and Grace, and then said he was very tired, and had dined, and only wanted some tea, and took Mabel indoors.

"You look very tired, Walter dear," said his wife, when they were alone, "and you seem unwell. Where have you been; and I hope nothing is the matter?"

"Nothing," he replied wearily, "except the old story."

"The old headache and faintness, dear?" she inquired, with alarm in her tones.

"No, no. At least I don't care about that. But I am dreadfully embarrassed for money, Mabel; and if I don't get some within a few days, I shall be in prison and ruined — that's all."

"O, what a dreadful thing! What are we to do? O, if I could do anything to help you, my dear Walter!"

"Yes, if you could, of course you would do it; but then you can't, and I don't see much use in talking about it."

"If that cruel old Jane Ethelstone would only help us, or would only die and leave us some of her wretched money!"

Walter shrugged his shoulders. He had been hearing of old Jane Ethelstone almost ever since he saw Mabel first; and there was no reason why she should die now any more than during any of the next dozen or twenty years, and no reason why they should expect anything from her, even at her death.

"That's the state of affairs, Mabel," he said, as he dropped languidly into a chair and leaned his chin upon his hand. "It has been threatening a long time, and now the end is close upon us. I am nearly ruined. And yet it would not take a great deal to help me over this difficulty, and enable me perhaps to come all right and make my way yet. A mere handful of money, as a rich man, Mabel, would think it — a mere handful would make us all happy."

It was "us" with Warton just now. "I" had all the pleasure, and schemed out the plans, and was to benefit by the success; "we" shared the failure, and were burdened with the task of reparation.

"How much, Walter?" his wife asked timidly.

She was thinking, it is to be feared, that Grace would soon have fifty pounds coming to her, and wondering whether that would do any good, and whether it would be too great a shame to borrow it from her.

"Only a trifle, in fact. Eight hundred, or at all events a thousand pounds, would bring me through for the present."

Eight hundred or a thousand pounds! Poor Mabel's countenance utterly fell. A thousand pounds for the present! As well say twenty thousand, fifty thousand, half-a-million at once.

"O, Walter dear, what a great sum of money! at least it seems great to me, dearest" — she saw him frown, and hastened to lower her tone of alarm — "because I cannot give it to you or get it for you. I am sure I don't know anybody on earth who could lend it, except Jane Ethelstone, who wouldn't give it if we were all in the work-house; and of course except —"

"Except whom? Speak quickly, Mabel."

"Well, darling, except Ralph Lennon. But then, you know, he has obliged us once already."

This was the very point Warton wanted to bring her to. He did not like to appear, even in her eyes, as if he had been planning an assault on Lennon's purse.

"Yes, that is true. I had quite forgotten Ralph Lennon. How strange that you should have thought of him!"

"No, not so strange, dear, when he has always been such a friend." Mabel was rather proud of having taken the initiative in thinking of anything. "I

know of course that he would do it if we asked him; but I did not know whether you would like to do so."

"Listen, Mabel. As you have mentioned Lennon's name, I have something to speak to you about which concerns him. How do you think Grace feels towards him?"

"O, Walter, I'm sure I don't know. I never asked her."

"No; but I thought all women had sharp eyes and quick senses for that kind of thing. Do you think she cares about him — loves him?"

"I don't know whether she has any feeling of that kind. She was angry once when I merely jested about the probability of his marrying her."

"Would she marry him if he asked her?"

"I daresay she would. I don't see why she should not. I am sure it would make me very happy if she did, though I should be sorry to lose her. But does he love her, Walter?"

"That I don't know. I am sure he has a sincere affection for her — a friendship, you understand; and I feel convinced he would marry her if he got the slightest encouragement. I don't suppose a man like him, who has long ceased to be a boy, thinks very much about romantic love when he goes to marry a girl. Grace would suit him admirably. She is a clever girl, with tastes much like his own; and he

would soon get to love her quite as much as is necessary."

"It would be a very good thing for her. It would provide for her, poor child; but I should like him to love her, Walter."

"Yes, yes, of course. So he would, no doubt; perhaps he does already. It would be a good thing for her, Mabel; and it would be a good thing for him too; and any true friend of his ought to be glad to see it brought about. It might save him from folly, or danger."

"My dear Walter, save him from what?"

"I don't like to say, or even to hint; but I can't help observing. He lives too near — Myra Alwyn" (the name came out with a strong effort); "and by Heaven I think she is in love with him!" He brought the declaration out in a burst of vehemence, and then ground his teeth and clenched his hand.

"O, Walter, how you frighten me! O, what a wicked woman she must be!"

He glared at her savagely, and was on the point of making some fierce answer; but he checked himself, and only said:

"My dear, we must not judge our fellow-creatures in that way. I said I thought or feared this; but I did not even suspect anything more than a feeling on Mrs. Alwyn's part; and I don't wish you, however virtuous yourself, to run quite into the worst extreme in con-

demning her. That may be the way of the world, Mabel; but it need not be our way."

"Of course you are right, Walter — you always are; and I am sorry I spoke in that hasty uncharitable way; but you are always so good and charitable and Christianlike. Only it shocked me when you spoke of a married woman — and a clergyman's wife too! — being in love with anybody not her husband. O, Walter dear, is it not shocking to think of married people having any such wrong feelings?"

"Dreadful, dreadful, of course. But now we are only talking of possibilities, you know, and of guarding against dangers. I think a girl like Grace might be the means of saving from any possibility of danger a man like Lennon; and might be the means, too, of saving others and securing much happiness. I think you might have a share in such a good work, by using your influence over her to persuade her to see things in that light. There, that is all; and all this, Mabel, came of your having suggested the name of Ralph Lennon as that of our only friend."

"Yes, dear; and in your anxiety about your friend you have forgotten all about yourself. Just like you! O, I too should so like to render any service to dear old Ralph! What a dreadful world it is! I think it would be the happiest thing that could befall Grace Ethelstone if she were to become an instrument in the hand of Providence to avert such dangers and calam-

ities. But about your own affairs, love? Shall we ask Ralph to — to come to our aid again?"

"Might it not be done, think you, through Grace? Might not she bring it about in some indirect way, if what we have talked of should come to pass? Would not that be rather a more delicate way, perhaps? And don't you think she would herself be glad to be the means of serving us — I mean, of serving you and the children?"

"I don't know, dear. Grace is the best-hearted creature in the world; there is nothing of her own she would not give. But she has strong ideas of independence, and all that. Girls have such wild romantic notions, and don't know, until they go into the world and have a family, what a dreadful thing it is to want money, and how people have to humble themselves to get it." Poor Mabel sighed. "But I think she would not mind doing this, if things went as we hope they may,"

"You can put it to her in some way, can you not, dear, to-night — not broadly or directly, but rather as a vague suggestion?"

"I will put it to her, and do my best. If I cannot get her to see it my way, then —"

"Then, of course, I will go directly and frankly to Ralph Lennon myself, and ask it of him openly as a favour. It is not, after all, such a great matter. But I had rather the request did not come directly

from me — or indeed directly, as a request, from anybody.”

This was Warton's process of reasoning: “Lennon is a strange, eccentric, independent, generous man. Let him but be induced to think that I, Walter Warton, struggling terribly with difficulties, would rather break down utterly than acknowledge the fact to him and even seem to ask for help, and he is just the sort of creature to do something spontaneously of the most generous and delicate nature.”

He did not want Grace to ask Lennon's help; he did not expect or wish her to do it. Let but Mabel convey to Grace a clear idea of the difficulties that surrounded them, and Grace only allow a hint of them to escape her lips to Lennon, and enough would be done.

Warton now was impatient and ardent to bring about an engagement between Grace and Lennon. He spoke at least some of his true feelings to his wife. He wished to see Lennon removed out of the path of the Alwyns into the cloud and distance of married life; and it was always his fate to be too clever by half. Had he let things alone, all would probably have gone just as he wished; but he was not satisfied without employing the agency of an additional stimulus alike to Mabel and to Grace.

His wife fulfilled her mission that night. How it succeeded he knew when she came with pale face and

tearful eyes into his room. How it succeeded he would have known still better could he have looked into Grace's bedroom, and seen her stretched, half kneeling, half lying, on the floor, her head pressed against the side of her little bed, and her figure shaken with cruel sobs and spasms of grief. The beautiful world of the morning and the day was all shattered to pieces. It had collapsed and disappeared. The old similitude which likens human hope to the child's soap-bubble impressed its truth in letters of fire on the heart of Grace Ethelstone.

For poor Mabel had gone about her task in the way that of all others was the most distinctly doomed to frustrate it. First, she appealed to Grace to help Walter and the children and herself out of their difficulties, until Grace flushed and shivered at the thought of trafficking in Lennon's love and her own, and she and Mabel seemed like mean conspirators laying traps to catch a wealthy suitor. But that was nothing compared with what followed. Mabel went on to plead for Ralph himself; and, warming with her subject, she described him as one whom the spells and snares of another Venusberg were threatening, and whom only a good wife could redeem. She alluded passingly, but too suggestively, to Lennon's earlier years and his real or supposed follies, as they had been purposely pictured to herself one well-remembered time; and at last she succeeded in conveying to Grace's startled mind the

idea of a mission assigned to her against which every pulse of her heart throbbed with antagonism. She was then merely appointed to "redeem and release from love that recalls and represses" one who had "loved too soon," and "lost love's rose, and cared not for glory's." Her idol, her hero, her one high-souled man, was the creature to whom she was thus to minister! Her own life so far had taught her a dread, a dislike, and a contempt of men. Her father had been weak and wild, and would probably have made his home unhappy, but that he had the good fortune to die young. Warton she saw through to the selfish sensuous heart, and despised. To her girlish fancy, repelled by such men as she had chiefly known or heard of, Lennon rose up at last a sort of knight without reproach. And now he was pictured to her as just like the rest; and she was urged to marry him because he was like the rest! Her sense and spirit rose in revolt, and overcame. Her life, in its intellectual part, had been lonely so far; and solitude always strengthens a soul which it cannot enfeeble. Her soul was strong enough even for this sacrifice. She knew that the decision she was making was the fate of her life's whole happiness; but she decided. She said not much to Mabel; not much, but enough. When she was left alone she read Lennon's letter over and over again, now with other eyes than those which judged it in the morning. "This, then,"

she sobbed to herself, "is the kind of love that even he can offer! Rather than accept it I would die — O, my God, rather than accept it I will even live — alone!"

CHAPTER VI.

“Thou shalt renounce.”

It was a fierce and fitful summer day — a day of thunder and drenching showers, alternating with sudden and burning sunlight — when Ralph Lennon, who had come to London the previous night, left his old quarters at the Eleanor's Cross Hotel for the train which was to carry him to Grace. His mind naturally went back to the bright day — not so long ago — when he saw her for the first time, and called her “Mabel,” seeing in her the reflection of that pale past love now faded below the horizon of his life, and only remembered because of its refraction. Insensibly had grown upon him since that time the love he felt towards Grace, and which he now knew to be the one true passion of his existence. It had not flashed upon him like the concentrated rays from the burning-glass, but had grown warmer and brighter by degrees, commanding his intellect and his sympathies as well as his heart, and subduing him at last by the dear, tender, familiar glow of habit. For months and months she had occupied a daily increasing part of his thoughts, even before he had come to recognise the fact that he loved her, or had formed

any clear hope of winning her love. All the special objects he had in view when he came back to England had disappeared, or proved failures. He had tried to do good, and failed utterly, and was only regarded with distrust or contempt where he thought to be a benefactor. He had resolved to lead a sort of anchorite life; and, behold, he had fallen in love, and was about to marry. He thought his years of sentiment and passion had gone for ever; and, lo, he was a boy again, in feverish hope and fitful alternations of doubt and joy; and he could almost tremble as he felt in anticipation the touch of a girl's hand — a girl who was in her cradle when he was passionately and vainly pleading his first love. Could it be that the brightness of a life which seemed to have passed its meridian was only dawning for him? And if he should fail, what then remained? He shut this thought from him. It could not be.

He grew intensely nervous as the train ran into the station. But his nervousness gave way to surprise and excitement when he saw Grace Ethelstone on the platform. There was no one else there except the porters and the station-master, and Lennon was the only one who got out of the train. He sprang towards Grace, and called her by her name. She gave him her hand in silence, and it trembled as he touched it. She was very pale — he could see this even through the veil which she kept down — and her eyes looked as if long

tears had wasted them. His heart sank. This looked not like a wedding.

"Has something happened?" he asked excitedly.

"No, Mr. Lennon — nothing," she answered. "Pray don't think it strange if you find me here, and I tell you that I came to meet you. I did — I felt anxious that you should not come to the house. I wished to speak to you here, or anywhere — not there — and so I waited for you here."

"You have received my letter, Grace?" He spoke slowly and heavily.

"I have."

"And you have come here to answer it?"

"Yes, Mr. Lennon."

He knew that he must prepare to hear the worst. He controlled his emotion with a strong effort, and offered her his arm to leave the station. The train had gone its way, and they were under the eyes of the few railway officials. He meant to lead her to the road outside, but she said:

"There is a waiting-room here, Mr. Lennon, and there is no one there; will you let me speak to you there for a moment?"

She spoke with a childlike simplicity and unreserve. He went with her into the dull little waiting-room, furnished with a stony sofa, two rigid chairs, and a table on which nothing ever rested but carpet-bags, and adorned with a few pictorial advertisements of

Brighton hotels and Yorkshire hydropathic establishments. It was lonely, dark, and silent as a little vault.

There was just a moment's pause. Lennon would have given anything that he could break out into a storm of passionate appeal and protestation, but her sad expression and tone chilled him. She broke the silence:

"Your letter, Mr. Lennon, was a surprise to me; but I thank you deeply for all you have said in it. I can never forget how kind and good you have been, and I hope you will believe that I always appreciate your motives; but I cannot accept your offer, and I thought it best to come and meet you here at once, and frankly tell you so."

"But you will tell me, you must tell me, something more than this. You will tell me — no matter in what words; the harder the better — why you have resolved so suddenly to refuse me."

"Ah! I have no hard words of any kind to speak to you; but I cannot marry you, Mr. Lennon — O, how I wish I could!"

The simplicity of this avowal, accompanied by a sudden rush of tears into Grace's eyes, bewildered Lennon, and at the same time made his heart throb with the quickening of a new hope. He caught her in his arms.

"Thank God for that word, Grace! I will not

listen to any more denials; I have heard enough. I don't care what difficulties or objections you may think you see, you shall be my wife; I will never leave you."

She disengaged herself quietly, and said: "No, Mr. Lennon, it cannot be. Don't think me a mere silly girl, to refuse only that I may be pressed into consenting; my mind is fixedly made up. Only the heart knows its own bitterness! — only I myself can know what it has cost me to have to make this resolve. But I tell you truly what I have determined to do, and you will not — I appeal to you — make me more unhappy by striving to change my purpose."

"But you do not think, you cannot think, that you can leave me in this way? you do not believe that I can take this answer? Grace, I have set my whole life, my whole hope of happiness, on your answer."

She shook her head, and something of a flush came over her face as she asked:

"How many loves can a man's life comprise?"

"The rest of my life shall, at least, comprise but one. Grace, this is not worthy of you: past follies or weaknesses or temptations are not to be reckoned even against the best of men. I cannot believe that you are thus influenced; there is something far deeper behind. Tell me, I beseech of you, what it is that persuades you to refuse the offer I make you of a love

that is as deep as my whole heart, and shall last out my life — ay, and long, long survive it, if all be not myth and fable on which we build our hopes? Tell, me, dearest, dearest Grace, what secret thought impels you to reject me?"

"Mr. Lennon, I need not tell you. Your own heart must surely tell you. Look into your heart, and ask it what your motive was in offering to marry me. O, it was a generous and a kindly motive. I well know that — I don't mistake it. It was the wish to take a poor girl from poverty and give her a life of ease and freedom. But you don't know women yet, Mr. Lennon — at least such women as I should wish to be —"

"I don't understand a word of this," he interrupted passionately. "I love you, Grace, as deeply and truly as ever man loved woman. I had no such pitiful motive in my mind. I have not any of the hyperbolical charity in me which you seem to describe. I love you; and I did believe, or think, or hope, that you loved me. And I have nothing to offer you but my love. I am not young. I told you frankly in my letter how well I knew that we are not suited in years, or in anything perhaps; but I thought you would overlook all that — and — and love me. If I was wrong in this, why spare me the truth? Let me know it at once. I am not idiot enough to think that a gifted and beautiful girl like you — yes, like you; I mean

no idle compliments, Heaven knows — is bound to throw herself into the arms of the first man who chooses to make love to her. Tell me the truth and the worst at once. Look me in the face, let me see your eyes, and say that you do not and cannot love me; and I will free you that moment from any persecution of mine. I will bear my lonely life how I may, though beyond all words more lonely now than it was when first I saw you here; and you shall be free at least from further importunity."

"O, Mr. Lennon, how can you ask me? how can you thus force an answer from me?"

"Yes; I must even force it. I must know. I will not allow you to leave this place until you tell me. Grace Ethelstone, do you not love me?"

She drew calmly away from him, and seemed to struggle with her emotion, that she might make a deliberate decisive answer. He waited for the worst, and nerved himself to bear it. He stood firm and fixed, with lips compressed, as a brave soldier may stand to receive the volley from his old comrades, who are drawn out to give him his doom of death.

"Mr. Lennon, I scorn to deceive you. I prefer rather, if it must be, to humiliate myself. I did love you, and I hoped to love you always."

An exclamation of joy broke from him, and he seized her in his arms, and kissed her again and again. She hardly resisted; and O, what a wild temptation it

was to her to abandon herself wholly to his love and to her own! But the bitter thought came over her that she would be only giving a whole heart in exchange for half a love, for the relics and embers of a heart; and she wrapped herself in her almost fierce independence, and stood isolated again.

From a social and conventional point of view it was just as well that she did so. For she had hardly drawn herself away, when a railway porter, trying to find occupation somewhere, looked into the waiting-room, glanced all around, as if to show official keenness and attention, and then went away — rather proud of the fact that there really were passengers to be seen in the place at a dead hour of the day, when the station was usually as much of a solitude as Robinson Crusoe's island before the pious mariner touched its shores. The traffic of this station with the busy world was only at two regular intervals, like the tides. The City men ebbed away after breakfast, and flowed back again to late dinner or early tea; and between these tides there was only a blank.

The momentary interruption of the porter gave Grace and Lennon alike an opportunity of recovering their composure of demeanour, and a reminder that, after all, even in this station, walls might have ears, and porters had certainly eyes.

"I cannot understand you, Grace," Lennon resumed in hesitating accents of strongly compressed

emotion; "you will not say you do not care for me — do not love me —"

"I will not say I did not love you, Mr. Lennon. It would not be true if I were to say so."

"Then why refuse me? why torture me and yourself by so cruel a chimera as that which you have raised? Do you think me so ignoble as to be incapable of loving? Do you think me so stupidly incapable of appreciating you, as to suppose that anything but love could win you? You would not surely make us both unhappy for our lives because of a fantastic suspicion, or some perverted idea of independence? Grace, I could not have believed that you would be unjust and cruel."

"Mr. Lennon, you are a scholar, and a man of experience and science, and you have talents and gifts; but there are things you don't understand. You don't understand, I think, the heart of a woman — at least, of some women. You do not know how much they ask when they give their love, and how deeply degraded they must be when they consent to accept less. I have nothing on earth to give a man — nothing that could tempt the poorest being that works for his bread — but my love and my heart; but these I could give wholly and for ever; and I will never, never give them where less is offered in return. I have seen little life, but yet enough to teach me what slaves, what abject and miserable slaves, women are who accept less than

the one love of a whole heart, or who have not eyes to see that they are denied it. Many misfortunes may happen to me, but this one never!"

"Then," said Lennon, "I talk in vain. I cannot hope to move you. I have no such fresh first love and pure heart to offer. I do not blame you, Grace, for setting your claims so high; but I cannot meet them. You know more perhaps of my life than I thought — more than it appeared to me, looking over it, I daresay, too thoughtlessly, it was of any use that you should know. Men regard these things lightly; so do most women. I do not blame you that you do otherwise. Your standard is too high for me. I now know your meaning, Grace. You ask me in other words: Have I anything to offer worthy of your pure and perfect love? I answer, I have not."

"Yet you do not understand me, Mr. Lennon; I am not so vain and self-conceited. I know too well how little right I have to set up any such standard. I am not one of your saints — I don't appreciate saints. I fear I could not turn away, perhaps, even from a criminal, if I loved him — and if — if I felt that he loved only me."

"But I love only you," exclaimed Lennon vehemently. "Can you not see it? Have you no eyes to judge? women generally don't want that insight. Why have I followed you, and clung to you for months and months? Have we not looked love to each other?"

"We have, — it is true; and I cannot think of it now without feeling ashamed of my own weakness. O, Mr. Lennon, have even *you* no sense of the cruel contempt of the love of men to women? Am I the only one to whom you have protested such things? Have I had no predecessors? And who is to tell me that I should have no rivals? What happiness, what blessing could come of such a marriage?"

"Someone," he said sternly, "has been poisoning your mind against me."

"No, no — I declare to you no. I know no one who is not your friend — no one who would not bitterly blame me for what I am doing now."

"Yet you *have* heard something of me which has decided you. O, yes; there are such things to be told: and one's friends can tell them. They can always fill up the blanks which our own tenderness to ourselves does not think it quite necessary to supply. I daresay all you have heard is true. My life was not — what it ought to have been. I do penance for it — now, at this moment, more, far more, than ever before. Let it be so — I have no more to say."

Grace's tears were bursting from her eyes. "O, Mr. Lennon," she exclaimed, "how harsh and cruel you must think me; but think, too, how much I suffer! I know — my heart and conscience tell me — that we ought not to marry; that I could not believe in the endurance of your love; that you would soon begin to

tire of me — no, no, don't tell me anything else, please; you believe it now, but a short time would bring change. Ah! you, Mr. Lennon, you men are not like us: love is only a plaything with you — a thing to be fondled in the intervals of ambition and business and pleasure, like an infant. Such love some women can accept, and can be happy with it, and make their husbands happy: I could not. I could not warm myself on the ashes of a heart. Let us leave each other while there is time, before we come to scorn and hate each other — and I should scorn and hate anyone who gave me but half a love or the intervals of a love, and myself for having consented to accept such a fate."

Yet was there not a yielding softness in her voice? Did not the tears that relieved her heart speak promise to her lover? Yes, doubtless. Had Lennon, then, once more caught her in his arms and passionately renewed the pledge of his undying love, she might have relented and gone his way, and run her risk, and surely not repented; but Lennon's sensitive and proud nature — proud even in the uncompromising recognition of his own defects — was deeply pierced by her words. He saw in her a pure, unworldly, high-minded girl, with a heart that the flesh and the devil had never tainted; and he looked back upon his own stormy youth and feverish years of folly and heedlessness and ingratitude, and his manhood of futile penitence; and he

said to his soul that it would be a shame and sin to mingle two such natures. "There is no recalling the past," he bitterly thought; "and you cannot mingle the pure and the impure if the first be true to itself. I accept my sentence."

So he bowed his head to that which now seemed Heaven's judgment, and pleaded no more against it.

"You are right, Grace," he said with forced calmness, "and I accept your decision; indeed, it was not without sore misgiving and doubt that I ever ventured on thinking one so pure and noble-minded as you could be induced to mingle her life with the wreck and remnant of a life like mine. I cannot blame you — although your words take away from me any last poor chance of happiness. Good-bye. I met you here for the first time; it seems only right that I should take leave of you here for ever."

"Then we must not meet any more, ever again?" she asked in accents broken by emotion.

"No more, no more — unless —"

She shook her head sadly, and crushed with a decided expression any faint hope that might for the moment have revived within him. She was broken-hearted, but her resolution was firmly set. Poor Mabel's confidences, the cruel kindness of her arguments to show the need of some good woman taking Ralph Lennon's life in hand, had been decisive.

"Some day, Mr. Lennon," she said, with a wan

and feeble effort at a smile, "you will be glad of this and will thank me in your heart that I saved you from the result of a sudden and generous impulse. And I — if I am never glad, yet I shall still think I have not done wrong; and, as you said yourself the other day, when you quoted to me from one of your classical poets, I will order my heart to bear it."

"Life," he replied, "to you is long and full of hope, the sun is not behind you; you will be happy, and forget all this. You consult your own happiness, and you are right."

"O, Mr. Lennon, how can you be so cruel! Consult my own happiness, and forget! I have trodden my own happiness under foot; and *we* are not like men, we do not forget — when everything else in life is forgotten, a woman remembers her love."

"When everything else in life is forgotten," he added in bitter tones, "the sins of a man are remembered to him."

"Are we parting then in this way — in bitterness?"

"No, not in bitterness, Grace; but I am not so good a Christian as to be able to reconcile myself to this at once."

"One word," she suddenly interposed, "one request. I do ask you, Mr. Lennon, to promise me that you will tell no one of what I have said to-day; I have a reason for it, which you may guess. You have gener-

ously spared me reproaches from your own lips; spare me also the reproaches and remonstrances of others."

"I understand you; and you may rely on my silence, even if I had a motive to speak, which surely I have not."

She moved towards that door of the waiting-room which opened on the side of the station beyond which lay the road she had to walk homeward. At the door she turned, and held out her hand:

"Let us part with words of friendship," she said tremblingly.

But he pressed his lips to her forehead and then to her lips. "I leave you," he murmured, "with no poor words of pretended friendship. I love you, Grace, and shall love you always; and it shall be at once my joy and my punishment to think that you might have loved me."

And then she left the station and walked alone her road, and never looked back; but agony rang a knell in her ears and in her soul like the chorus in *Faust*: "O woe! O woe! the beautiful world — thou hast destroyed it." She felt like one on whom the bitterness of death has fallen, and who knows of no heaven to follow.

CHAPTER VII.

Another Appeal.

OF all men living, of all persons living, Grace Ethelstone would have wished that day to avoid Walter Warton. She had a terror present to her mind all through her interview with Ralph — the terror of Warton's making his appearance at the railway-station and seeing her. She knew he would not stay long at home; and she hoped by walking back through all manner of circuitous and obscure ways she might avoid him, and not reach the house till after he had gone; but she was not so fortunate. Just as she came in sight of the house she saw him standing at the little gate; in fact, he was waiting for her. He had told Mabel that he must speak to Grace, and bade his wife keep in the house. There was no turning back now; and Grace was too proud to show any emotion of any kind under such eyes, if she could possibly help it — indeed, her fear of meeting him was chiefly a fear of herself, and a doubt of her own strength to hide her feelings.

"You are out early, Grace," Warton said.

"Yes, Walter. I often go out early."

"And alone?"

"Yes. I like to be alone."

Warton only smiled at this rather marked intimation.

"Solitude is the nurse of genius, Grace — so some great person says: Gibbon, I think — but I fear it is only in our younger and more romantic days we quite appreciate the sentiment. Will you let me break in on your solitude for a moment or two? I want to talk to you, my dear; and I don't see you very often. Shall we walk this way?"

"Any way you please, Walter."

"In this direction, then; for it will bring me a little nearer to the station."

They walked in silence until they had passed some of the houses: then they turned into a quiet lane. Grace endeavoured to seem quite easy and unconcerned, and, to keep up appearances, stopped now and then and plucked a wild-flower. An unlucky device too; for one which she plucked proved to be of a kind Ralph Lennon was very fond of, and its fragrance brought to her heart a sudden rush of sweet and bitter memories; and Walter, looking suddenly round, and about to open his explanations, saw that tears had started into her eyes.

"I am afraid, Grace, that Mabel has been foolishly saying something which pained you? I am very sorry; but she meant it well, poor Mabel."

"Mabel has been saying nothing, Walter, but what you told her to say, I suppose."

"What has she been saying?"

Grace made no reply.

"Speak, dear, and don't be childish. What has she been saying?"

"I can't go over it all again, and I don't mean to. It is cruel of you, Walter, to ask me. *You* know what she said."

"Well, I suppose, in plain words, she urged you to marry Ralph Lennon?"

"She did. At least she was the interpreter of the message, or the command, or whatever it was. She urged me to lie in wait for Mr. Lennon, to plot for him, to insist on marrying him, — because he has money."

"Was that all?"

"What more would you have? It was not like Mabel to speak so. It was not she, indeed, who spoke. The advice was yours, Walter."

"It was, Grace. It was mine; and I now repeat it. I only wish I had spoken to you myself in the first instance, and not left it to poor Mabel to bungle and misinterpret. The advice was given, Grace, solely for your good. If you were my daughter — indeed, I can hardly think of you but as a daughter — my advice would be the same. You have too much intellect and spirit and sense to be doomed to a poor and drudging

life. You were made for something much better. You have wasted enough of your time on us: waste no more. It would be in vain. Think of yourself. You cannot help *us*. I tell you frankly, girl, we are ruined! — I am lost! It will deeply embitter my failure and my trouble if you, so unlike other women, so highly deserving of something better, should be dragged down too."

There was so much sincerity about his manner and his tone, that Grace felt involuntarily touched by it, and glanced at him with something of pity and respect. He saw the glance, and understood it. He knew that his way of putting the case was telling on her.

"That is all, Grace my dear. That is my earnest advice. *We* are lost. Mabel goes down with me; but there is a way of escape open for you, which you may accept with honour. Marry Ralph Lennon. Don't think I would advise you to marry a man merely because he has money. But Lennon is a man of brains, and of heart too; and a woman may well be happy with him. *You*, I know, have ambition; and you are too sensible a girl to believe in romantic poverty. Trust one who has experienced it, dear. There is no happiness where there is poverty."

"O, Walter, for shame! I don't believe a word of it."

"Don't you? Look at our home. You know all its miserable struggles and shifts and meannesses,

cramping the soul and wearing out the brain. Do you tell me there could be happiness in such a place?"

"Yes, Walter, I do. I do indeed — with — with —"

"With what, girl?"

"Well, Walter, with love, of course."

He smiled pityingly.

"I don't mean to answer you, Grace, with the usual sarcasms or the usual commonplaces about love escaping by the window when poverty comes in at the door. But look calmly at it. When a man's first concern in the morning must be how to meet the money-demands of the day, can he find a place in his thoughts for love? When he lies awake at night racking his brain to discover some way of meeting an overdue and inexorable bill, do you think he can extract comfort from the kisses of his wife? When she has to face the tax-gatherer, and talk him into waiting yet a little longer; when the butcher declines to send any more, and the baker threatens with the County Court; and the housemaid grows impertinent, because of her unpaid wages and her mistress's too obvious poverty, — do you think the wife is quite in a condition to enjoy a sentimental walk in the moonlight, and to gaze fondly into her bankrupt husband's eyes? Grace, these little mean miseries kill love. It dies under them like some fine animal pricked to death by tiny poisoned darts. You don't understand even the weakness

of women. There are scores of women who could plunge into fire with a man, and die there clasping him to the last, but whose love would not endure two years of mean, unheroic, ignoble poverty. I don't blame them — I quite understand it."

"I don't, Walter; and I don't want to. I don't believe any woman worth the name has that abject and craven dread of poverty. I should be ashamed of them, and hate them all, and myself too, if I thought of them as you do. No; don't argue it with me, Walter. I can't argue, but I don't want to be convinced by you; and you could not convince me. Life is not all so mean as you think it."

"The time will come when you will acknowledge that the petty evils of poverty are more demoralising than the heavy strokes of fate."

"Well, Walter" (she was rather weary of the barren discussion), "it does not personally concern me much to confute your dreadful heresy. There is no poor and bankrupt lover suing to me, and no rich lover either. I hope I have hands and brains to make myself a living somehow, and I am not at all afraid of being poor. I know so little of any other condition, that I suffer no privation."

"But you need not be poor. You can marry Ralph Lennon."

She was on the point of an outburst of anger. There was something revolting to her in this way of

treating the subject. But she controlled herself, and endeavoured to answer in a light and careless tone:

"Would you give Mr. Lennon himself no choice or voice in the matter? Would you recommend me to make the proposal?"

Walter thoroughly misunderstood her this time. He really believed that she was looking at the matter coolly and sensibly, according to his way of thinking, and that she only wanted a fair and creditable opportunity of falling in with his views. He was very much pleased. This comes, he thought, of talking to a girl as if she was a rational human being — not going on in Mabel's nonsensical way.

"No, my dear, I don't recommend you to do exactly that: but you can easily give Lennon a little more encouragement. He always was a shy reserved sort of fellow; but he is kind-hearted, and generous, and easily won. Grace, I have so high a regard for him that I speak, indeed, as much for him as for you. In making yourself happy, you may be the means of saving him."

"Then this," said she, at last breaking from all restraint, "is the high task you intend for me! You ask me to throw myself in Mr. Lennon's way, at his feet perhaps, and cajole him into marrying me; and you encourage me to this by telling me that I can only save him from other women by marrying him myself! I would not have such a social creed, such ideas of women, for all the world! Walter, you mean to do

me good, no doubt, but you have taken a wrong way to do it. I would marry a man were he poor as a beggar if I loved him, and if he loved me, and me alone; but I hope I shall never be mean and base enough to throw myself at the feet of anyone who is capable of being the slave of the first woman that crosses his path."

"But, my dear child, you greatly exaggerate —"

"No, no — I don't exaggerate. I understand only too well what you mean, and what Mabel meant. She told it to me plainly enough."

"Grace, if you suppose there is anything in Ralph Lennon which makes him unworthy of a good wife, I tell you most earnestly, my dear, that you misunderstand him and do him a great wrong — and a great wrong as well to Mabel and to me. As truly as a man can speak, I do assure you that I never knew anyone with a higher and more generous nature than Ralph Lennon. Let me do him that justice — it is only bare justice. He and I were once warm and close friends; and though of late we have been somewhat estranged — I don't very well know why — I must say that I have seen no change in the truth and manliness of his nature. I wish I were like him! Ah, no, Grace; you may not love him, perhaps — I speak out plainly; you are no silly schoolgirl — but you must esteem him."

Something of a crimson glow that flashed across

Grace's cheek — something that sparkled in her eyes — something in the instant dropping of her eyelids and catching of her breath — as she heard the words, "You may not love him," smote upon Warton's attention, and brought upon him in a moment a conviction he had not expected. He could not mistake it. The sincerity and transparency of Grace's nature betrayed her secret.

He laid his hand gently, almost tenderly, upon hers. He was really touched, and for the moment actually forgot his own speculations and aims. "Poor girl!" so ran for an instant the silent current of his thoughts, "she really loves him. I never counted upon this. I do wish he loved her — I hope he does. If he does, then there is no difficulty in making her happy, at least; and even if he does not, he is a generous sort of fellow, who can easily be induced to marry her out of good-nature, and he cannot but come to be fond of her in the end."

There was a throb of something like sincere and disinterested pleasure in his heart at the thought that he might perhaps be able to bring about a consummation which would secure at least one poor girl's happiness. He thought he now quite understood Grace's warmth of protestation against Mabel's well-meant advice. "She loves him; and Mabel's talk has only made her think he cares nothing about her, or perhaps is not capable of really caring about anyone. Quite natural

that a spirited girl should feel disappointed and angry, and should chafe at the idea of throwing herself at a man's feet when he ought to be at hers. What an idiot Mabel is; and how little she understands of the nature of any human being! Well, well, I think this can be all put right; and I shall lose no time in bringing about the result which will suit us all."

He had come to a stop when the expression of her face made such an impression on him. They were still standing, and he kept his hand laid gently upon hers. She did not speak. At last he broke the silence:

"Let us say no more of this just now, dear child. I am very glad I spoke to you about it; but I don't want to trouble you by any further talk over it. Be sure, Grace, I understand your feelings, and appreciate them. I desire your happiness, but surely not at the expense of your better nature. Grace, I understand you at last. Do you understand me?"

"I think not, Walter."

"Not!"

"I think not. Forgive me if I speak too plainly."

"Speak more plainly still, dear. Why do you think you do not understand me?"

"Because I sometimes think you are sincere and disinterested — and sometimes I do not."

"Just now, which opinion do you lean to?"

"I hope what you say is well-meant and sincere;

but I cannot keep myself from thinking that behind it there is something I am not allowed to see."

"Your old prejudices, Grace. You never — at least, never of late — have given me any confidence, or shown me any warmth. You think I neglect Mabel — is not that the first cause of your want of confidence?"

"It is. I am angry about Mabel, and grieved for her. But what we are speaking of now is not that. Last night you sent Mabel to me, and set her a part to play — only she said more, perhaps, than you intended. You were making an instrument of her, Walter, for some purpose of your own. Are you not also making an instrument of me?"

"No, Grace; no, by Heaven! — not now!"

"Not now?"

"Not now. I declare it on my honour, on my soul, if you need such a protestation. At any time my motive — my principal motive, dear; nobody in this life is influenced by one sole motive — was only one that every prudent father or guardian allows to influence him, and is respected by all the world for. I was anxious to secure you a promising and prosperous settlement in life — to save you, dear, from our wreck. A worldly motive, doubtless; but I am a man of the world. *Now* I have another and a deeper motive — to secure your happiness."

He spoke these last few words so slowly and with so marked an emphasis that she could not mistake his meaning, and she reddened under his gaze. But she plucked up courage, looked him full in the face, and replied:

"Walter, I am glad to believe that this is all you had in your thoughts. I am glad to believe it — and I do believe it. But I beg and pray of you, if you really desire my happiness, to put such thoughts wholly away. Never, O, I beseech of you, never try to make me happy — in that way. Indeed, indeed, it cannot be. Don't ask me for any explanations. You would perhaps think me foolish and romantic and nonsensical; but I cannot make my nature anything that it is not — and" — she began to fear she was becoming too serious and earnest — "and I don't want to marry anyone just yet. I prefer my independence, Walter — my crust of bread and liberty, like the country mouse; and please, Walter, we will not talk of this any more, and you will promise me not to think of it any more."

He was anxious himself now to dismiss the subject, for he began to think he saw his way. That all her scruples and doubts and love of independence could be easily conquered he felt convinced; indeed, they hardly seemed worth thinking about. He felt no doubt that he could bring that little story interjected into the volume of his life to a fit and happy conclusion; and he did not care to bind himself by any pro-

mises which might in the least interfere with his purpose. So he waved the whole question away with an easy gesture, and said:

"Well, Grace, you are a girl of sense; and your wishes shall, of course, be law to me. Let us say no more of this. I am glad we have spoken so frankly together; and I think you now, perhaps, understand me better than you did."

"Yes, Walter, I think so too."

"Then good-bye, dear — I am going this way; I return to town at once."

"Poor Mabel!" sighed Grace involuntarily.

"Poor Mabel!" echoed Warton; "who would not pity her, Grace? Do you wonder that I long to help to make someone happy — I, whose evil fate it has been to make *her* so unhappy? Do you wonder that life as I look at her is an agony to me? Do you wonder that I avoid her and fly from her? Do you wonder that, looking into the future, and seeing all dark for her and for my children, and for all who hold by me, I long, as compensation to earth, as atonement to Heaven, for the evil I have done, to help in throwing some light of happiness over *your* path? Think of this, Grace, and perhaps you will understand me better, and judge less hardly of me."

Without further farewell he left her, and went quietly on his way to the station. He did not once

look back, and he presently disappeared round a corner of the road.

Grace looked after him for a while without moving. She leaned against the grass-grown wall which bordered the little road, and felt very weary and sad. She had walked a great deal and had been a long time standing, and mere physical exhaustion came to the aid of mental excitement and suffering to enfeeble and depress her. Yet, with all her own special disappointments and trials, her mind rested with some anxiety and some wonder on what she had heard from Warton, and what she had seen in his face. She began to doubt whether she had not misunderstood him and wronged him all through — whether he was so utterly selfish and egotistical as she had long believed him to be. "I think something might, perhaps, have been made of him," she thought; and then acknowledging the reluctance she herself felt to endure just now the companionship of Mabel, recognising the impossibility of finding intelligent and responsive sympathy there, she could hardly wonder that Warton loved his home so little, and sought companionship elsewhere. Her own acute distress made her sympathetic and tolerant; and she recalled with pain the kindly words — were they even but words — which Warton had spoken of her, and the haggard look upon his face, and the dark eyes that burned with so ominous a light of anxiety and even despair. When

his hand touched her she felt that it was cold and damp and tremulous; and his whole frame looked weak and wasted, as it had never seemed before.

"How unhappy and miserable we are, all of us!" thought the poor girl; and then the full sense of her own misery rushed back upon her, and she remembered too how unhappy Lennon had seemed to be; and her heart sickened and sank within her, and she began to doubt whether her high resolve, which looked so just and so inevitable in the morning, was not, after all, a cruel and fatal delusion. Yet again, her pride, her hope, her romance perhaps, came to her aid, and forbade her to condemn herself because she had not been content to accept what she termed in her bitterness the ashes of a heart. I am afraid she was very unjust and hard in her reflections upon poor Mabel. "Why did she tell me such things?" murmured the wretched girl, sobbing and moaning now at last in grief that could no longer be controlled. "Why did she tell me anything about him? Could she not have left me to myself, to my own counsel? I should have been happy if I had heard nothing. I should never have known that he was not all my ideal—and so he would have been perhaps in the end. And now it is too late, too late, and all is over; and I have to go back to my miserable and lonely life, and he will forget me."

When she had relieved her feelings for a moment

by this burst of tears — in which she had revelled while the lane was lonely, and she could lean unheeded on the green bank and cover her face with her hands, unwatched by prying eyes — she raised her head and looked vaguely, sadly along the far horizon, now cleared by recent showers. In grief of any kind it seems the most natural impulse to turn the eyes to the line where sky and earth touch, and to think of some place beyond, and long to go there. "Over all the hill-tops," says the poet, "is rest" — at least wherever there are hill-tops and sad hearts it is sure that melancholy eyes look to the distant range, and send longing hopes to some vague imagined place of peace beyond them. The sky-line of Grace's landscape rested on no noble peaks, or swelling, motionless billows of hills, but only on the gentle undulations of a soft and sloping country. But still there was a horizon, suggesting a place beyond; and the farthest trees that could be seen had their boughs bent backward, and thus told of the breeze habitually blowing in from the not far distant sea. And the heart of the poor girl yearned for the place beyond — any place beyond — that horizon; and she said to herself, "I will go away, I will go away;" and, somewhat strengthened in spirit, she left the lonely little road and returned to the home which to her was yet more lonely.

It was a trial to bear with Mabel that long day and evening; for Mabel's heart was like some peaceful

and dull little church in a country village, which only rings its joy-bells or tolls its passing knell for things that concern the lord and master of the neighbourhood. She thought Walter was looking very weak and anxious, and she asked Grace perpetual questions about his appearance when he left her; and she told Grace she had found out by chance that lately dear Walter had become liable to such queer fainting-fits; "and my dear there must be something dreadful in that; to see a man faint must be worse than even to see a man crying, and that I think is terrible!" And she wondered whether he would be sure to get his dinner; and, poor thing, she fretted and worried herself so much that at last she got fairly tired out, and went to bed very early, and Grace was again alone. And then she threw herself eagerly, miserably back upon her own grief, even as a young bereaved mother steals away from those who would vainly console to gaze once more on the little bed where her first-born lies dead.

Meanwhile, Walter Warton went his way back to London. He felt in somewhat better heart than of late, for he thought that it lay quite easily within his power to bring about a marriage between Ralph and Grace; and this he had little doubt might be the means of serving his own purposes materially. But he was sincerely anxious to do Grace a service. He had always felt a little afraid of her, because he feared

that she saw through him; and he longed to conciliate her, to stand well in her eyes, to win her gratitude and affection. He longed, too, for his own special reasons that Lennon should be married, and thus removed out of his way; and in fact all things began to look rather hopeful, and Warton thought he saw the clouds breaking that lately seemed to close in hopelessly upon him. He got into the train almost elate, and for the time forgot the sick sensations, the weakness, the dizziness, the queer heart-pains he had been tormented so much by during recent months; and as he got out on the London platform he acknowledged to himself that he had not for a twelvemonth entered the metropolis with so hopeful a breast.

Unfortunately for his plans he had not been long in London when an event which he might have foreseen, and indeed ought to have expected, interposed suddenly and awkwardly between him and his purposes. The very next day he was a dismal, dejected captive in the hands of his most dreaded enemies.

CHAPTER VIII.

Flood and Fever.

WHEN Lennon reached his hotel in the Strand, late on the day of his parting from Grace, he found a telegram from Tom Berry awaiting him. It was laconic. "Floods here: awful destruction. No harm to us yet."

Lennon was a kind-hearted man; but the sense of relief which the excitement gave him did assuredly overcome his sympathy with the sufferers by the floods. At that moment he would have welcomed with fierce satisfaction the announcement of another general deluge. He was weary of the sun.

There was a night-train for the North which would carry him to Kendal or Windermere. He drank a whole bottle of champagne in some fierce draughts, and the wine neither flushed his cheeks nor soothed his heart. He drove to the train, and was three-quarters of an hour too soon. He chafed and raged up and down the dismal waiting-room until people began to crowd in there; and then he walked out and went to the farther end of the platform, where there was nobody. At last the time to start came; and as the train darted through the first tunnel he longed for a collision. Burning down a house to roast one's own

eggs illustrates the practice of selfish men; but unselfish men would sometimes welcome the thunder of a battle, or the crash of an earthquake, to drown their own grief.

All night through he went over and over his interview with Grace. He thought of new and powerful appeals which must have moved her; he studied with vain memory every look and word of hers, torturing himself with the thought that here perhaps — there perhaps — was hope, if he had but caught it in time. He answered her objections; he swore away her doubts; he appealed to her love, and even to her pity. He wondered at himself for his dulness, his want of perseverance, his impatience, his petulant pride. He was sorry he had left London so soon; that he did not go back and see her again, and, if needs were, tear her from her foolish doubts and fears. Then he told himself that after all she loved him, and he bade his heart take hope; and then again he said that no woman who really loved a man ever met his love with such scruples and such repulsion, and he gave himself to despair. Nor did he fail to ask himself who had filled Grace's heart with doubt of him. Warton? Had he not always suspected Warton of having blackened him to Mabel Ethelstone — when she was Mabel Ethelstone — years ago? Did they not quarrel about it? But Warton always denied it. In this instance, what motive could Warton have? Grace's own lips told him as plainly

as words could speak that her people would have wished her to marry him; and indeed his own eyes and ears and observation had long ago made this plain to him. There surely was no reason for suspecting War-ton. And yet of late Lennon never came near Warton without being pervaded by a subtle indefinable distrust, a sense of the presence of something like deceit and treachery. As he thought of this — thought of it one moment only to put it away the next, ashamed of giving it an instant's harbour — fierce vague vows of revenge came bubbling to his lips, and he sometimes started in fear lest some sound of menace had escaped his tongue and surprised his fellow-passengers. "Re-venge!" he said to himself bitterly. "What chance has a man of punishing his most treacherous enemy now? Duelling is out of fashion — as much out of fashion with the new polite world as I am myself." And he thought of the pistols which hung up at home, the old Australian pistols which had been his faithful friends many times in the rough early Ballarat days; and he felt that it would be a joy to put one of these into the hand of his enemy, and take the other himself and let God or the devil show the right. And again he scorned himself for the meanness of supposing that he had any such treacherous enemy, and that poor Mabel's husband, his own early friend, Walter Warton, who had often all but urged him to marry Grace Ethel-stone, could be that enemy.

So the short summer night dragged through, in a constant deluge of rain brightened by frequent lightning. It was clear day when he began to approach the lake country; and people who got in at the stations were beginning to talk of the dreadful succession of rainy weeks, and of the great floods in parts of Cumberland and Westmoreland and Lancashire. Ralph only slept a little by fits and starts, and when day came on was conscious that he looked like some haggard and wild night-bird dragged into the sun, and indeed was as careless about the matter as he was conscious of it. But he was glad when the railway journey was over, and he was near the place where there was some work to do, some excitement to be found.

For years and years there had been no such spring and summer in England. Rain, rain, incessant rain and storm, had sponged the beauty out of the landscape and the nourishment out of the corn. "The fruits of the earth were stinted;" and when rarely sun and warmth came on they were followed close by thunder, and then rain again. It was bad everywhere, and people complained and wondered and suffered from the Cheviot Hills to Southampton Water. But it was worst of all in the northern counties, and worst of all these in the lake and mountain land. We have already spoken of the deluging rain which came down during the last days of Warton's stay in Waterdale; and these days of rain it was which literally

caused the cup to overflow in that region. The lake, the river, the mountain streams all overflowed, and the tide poured seaward. The little town was for the most part a low-lying cluster of houses, bedded between lake and sea, and over it the waters literally rushed. The houses of the better class stood on higher ground here and there, and these were spared. Even an inundation commonly respects the classes whom it is proper to consider respectable. The lanes — one could hardly call them streets — of poor small houses were flooded almost to the garrets, when they rose high enough to have garrets. Small hovels were in many instances swept clean away. In the first alarm and confusion some poor creatures were drowned. Then, in wild affright, half-naked families deserted their flooded homesteads, and made for the high ground and the hills. Then the more sensible people, and those whose intelligence had not been paralysed by the sudden wash of a sort of sea sweeping through their bedrooms at stark midnight, began to take order with affairs, and to concert measures for sheltering the houseless, and clothing those whom the calamity had left bare.

Among those who never lost their presence of mind from the very first were Dr. Alwyn and his wife. Alwyn made as many expeditions up and down the town in a boat as a Venetian gondolier in carnival-time, and his wife was everywhere lending a helpful hand. And they found in none of the local people

anything like the energy, composure, shiftiness, and general usefulness which were brought into play at half a moment's notice by stout Tom Berry.

More than that, Tom Berry was for the time master of the situation. For the deluge which swept over the town rushed away from the higher ground on the other side of the lake, where the Phalanstery stood; and the flood, which now ran a tearing river down the mountain pass, swept by the Phalanstery, and plunged on to swell the lake; and the Phalanstery stood high and dry. So Tom Berry at once took on himself to offer the unoccupied houses — they were now nearly all unoccupied — as a shelter to as many of the houseless as the roofs could cover.

He did not wait for authority from Lennon.

"What's the good of wasting time, ma'am?" he put the case to Myra. "Don't we know it's the very thing Mr. Lennon would do? He wouldn't like, bless you, if he thought we lost any time through doubting of him. *I* know him. *I* understand him. When you understand a man in one thing you understand him in everything."

"I understand him too," said Myra rather sadly.

"Do you, ma'am? Well, I don't know. There's not many that quite understand Mr. Lennon, but *I* do; and if you do too, why, hadn't we better go to work and lose no more time about it?"

So they went to work and lost no more time. Many

families had actually to be brought down, shivering and half naked, from a gusty and cheerless shelter in the hills; and many were brought in boats and rafts across the lake; and all were established as comfortably as the condition of things would allow in Lennon's little village. Great fires blazed on every hearth, and provisions of all kinds were poured in by all the townspeople who could afford to help. The gentry of the place, living here and there at little distances, soon came to know of what had happened, and were quickly on the spot with contributions of money and clothes and food, and offers of personal service. The flood had risen to its height, had done its worst; composure had returned to people's minds; and local organisation, extemporised chiefly under the guidance of Dr. Alwyn, was doing its best, when Lennon arrived upon the scene.

Of course he threw himself heart and soul into the efforts that were being made. But he declined to take the command of the Phalanstery arrangements out of Tom Berry's hands.

"Tom, you villain," he said cheerily, "I envy you; but you have won the right to command here. You had the good fortune to be the first who found out how to make use of our Folly."

"I should be a very stupid duffer," grumbled Tom, "if I didn't see that there were people wanting houses, and houses wanting people, and that the two lots ought

to be brought together. Why, even a prime minister or a duke could almost have found that out." The theory that all ministers of the Crown were sticks, and all dukes imbeciles, was an article of faith with Tom, as sacred as any of the points of the loved and lost Charter.

In Lennon's heart there was a sort of pride that at last his poor effort of speculative benevolence had come to something. It was no longer a thing to laugh at; it was the first raft available when all else was going to pieces; it was the centre now of the relief organisation which the floods had made an inevitable necessity. Till late that night he went about from house to house of it, to see what could yet be done to add to the comfort of the inmates. Dr. Alwyn was with him. When they came out at last into the open air, Lennon stood for a moment and looked along the white rows of gleaming cottages, on which the moonlight now fell. An expression of something like gratification must have marked itself on his face; for Dr. Alwyn, having silently observed him for a moment, said with a smile,

"I know what you are thinking of, Lennon. Confess you are thinking about the stone which the builders rejected, and which yet became the corner-stone of the building — eh?"

"Perhaps I was — at least, of something to that

effect. Sincerely, Dr. Alwyn, I am glad to be of some use to anybody or anything."

"Come, now, you speak in a desponding and Byronic sort of tone, as if you had never personally done any good for human creature before, and as if no mortal being cared about you. Why, man, you mustn't think that of us! We have our slow ways and our prejudices here, and we get dreadfully frightened if anyone talks of the Mosaic account of creation; we think that smacks of science and infidelity. But you must not suppose we don't understand you and appreciate you. Just try us. Stand for the county — and I can't promise you that you'll get in; in fact, I know you wouldn't; but see if we here in this place don't all poll for you to a man. I would not answer for the women, if Mill's principles were in force. The petticoat has always been a banner of high orthodoxy; but for *us*, we would rally round you — isn't that the proper phrase?"

Dr. Alwyn spoke in a jesting tone; but he wished his words to have their earnest meaning too.

"I never doubted *your* good feeling," said Lennon; "but I think somehow this place and I don't quite agree. I have been thinking of striking my tent, Dr. Alwyn, and seeking a camping-ground somewhere else."

"I am sorry to hear it, but not surprised. I never expected you to vegetate here always. We shall miss

you here, all of us" — and here Alwyn's voice slightly failed him; for he could not help remembering how little he had seen of his friend lately, and why — "but we have no right to think of you settling down in such a place, and throwing away your years and your brains among us humdrum folks. You ought to go to London, and plunge actively into political life. You would soon make a way and a name."

"In politics? A Radical and Red Republican, and what not, such as I am?"

"Pooh, nonsense! you are only a Radical and Red Republican as I was once a votary of Shelley's *Queen Mab* and Volney's *Ruins of Empires* — just because I had nothing to go actively to work at. Find a path, Lennon, and tread it, and don't vex your brain with fantastic theories of any kind. If you want to reach any goal, you must look at the way before you, and not send your eyes wandering among the stars. Go to London, and go straight into practical politics; take up the management of our colonies, or the workhouse-hospital system, or the education question, or Irish land-tenure, or the regeneration of Poland if you like; and see if you don't soon fall into working habits, and leave dreams and nonsense behind. I like you, Lennon, in good faith, and I think too highly of you not to be sorry to see you running to seed here. *I bone, quo virtus tua te vocat, i pede fausto.*"

"I have not thought of settling in London," said

Lennon slowly; "I have thought rather of going to America — going out west, perhaps."

"Into the forest primeval? Don't do anything of the kind; it will be another failure, if you count your life here a failure. Give yourself up to human interest and the society of your kind. Live and work with educated human beings like yourself. Get married, and be happy."

Lennon shook his head. "I'm not what people call a marrying man."

"Why not? You seem to be just the sort of man to be very happy in married life. Take my advice, Lennon. It is not good for man to live alone."

"Very like; but man has to do things now and then that his physicians of soul or body don't prescribe as good for him."

"But there is no need for you to live alone."

"Well, I suppose I must only fall back on Sam Slick's excuse for celibacy. Those I would have wouldn't have me, and those who would have me the devil wouldn't have."

"Come, that won't do. I believe I, even I, could name one who would suit you exactly, and who, I think, would not be so hard as to refuse."

"No, you couldn't," replied Lennon, cutting the sentence short, "and it's useless trying. Good-night, Dr. Alwyn. One thing you may rely upon — before

I make up my mind finally to emigrate anywhere, I'll come and talk to you about it."

So they parted for that night. Dr. Alwyn went home, and began to talk to his wife about Lennon's determination to leave the place, and his apparent unhappiness. Myra was silent and restless, and evidently uncomfortable, and her eyes never met her husband's.

"She doesn't like him," thought Dr. Alwyn; "but I wonder she does not show more interest in the matter, when she knows how highly I think of him."

And he sighed, and thought that even the best of women are a little unreasonable in their ways, and that a man must not hope to argue them out of their likings or dislikings.

The course of events naturally threw Mrs. Alwyn and Lennon frequently together during the few days of excitement. But they were only thrown together. They spoke to each other merely as ordinary acquaintances might. Her manner, indeed, was constrained and distant. His was just what it usually was to her. Indeed, he was hardly thinking of her at all. When he did think directly of her, it was only to wonder how so energetic, zealous, and brave a woman could be so cold and formal.

One incident must be mentioned before the floods are seen to subside. Captain Eastham came over at an early stage of the business to lend a helping hand,

and made himself very active everywhere. Speaking one day to Lennon, he suddenly said:

"By the bye, have you heard from Warton lately?"

"No; not for weeks back."

"Then you don't know of his present fix?"

"Not at all. What is the matter?"

"Well, I suppose it's no secret; in fact it can't be, for lots of fellows know all about it. He's in the hands of the Philistines — Whitecross-street business. I'm very sorry for it; and he feels it sensitively — too sensitively by far. Some fellows don't mind it."

"I am very sorry indeed to hear it. Does his wife know?"

"Luckily not; and Warton is, above all things, anxious that she shouldn't. Of course, Lennon, I need not pledge you to secrecy. All things considered, it is now to Warton's advantage that he never was much of a family man, and his being away from home a few days more or less won't create any special wonder. I don't know Mrs. Warton myself, but I believe she is a very nice, good woman; and somehow I don't think Warton is the sort of man who ever ought to have married. It requires a genius for marriage to be able to make anything of it. I haven't the gift myself — and I doubt whether *he* has. If I were inclined to marry I think I should like to marry Warton's niece. I don't know whether you noticed her at all when she

was staying with the Alwyns — you don't profess to be much of a ladies' man, I believe; but she is a really fine girl, with plenty of talent and spirit, and not a bit of nonsense about her. I quite liked her; and I am doubly sorry for this business of poor Warton's."

"But can nothing be done?"

"Don't know, I am sure. As far as I am concerned, nothing. I am quite hard up myself, and so are most of the fellows I know. I fear my security wouldn't do much for Warton just now. As for the chiefs and the Carlton and that, I don't believe they would advance a sixpence to Warton. Between ourselves, some of the chiefs don't believe in him, don't like him — they say he has lost any popularity he ever had, and that he would do us more harm than good."

"Are his debts very heavy?"

"O no; not what you or I or most people would call heavy. I wish I could compound with my hereditary enemies for three times the amount."

"What is his figure?"

"Well, I don't of course know his full liabilities. I suppose nobody ever made full confession to his friends on that subject. But I know that a thousand, or twelve hundred at most, would release him from the bonds of captivity just now, and give him a chance of another run."

"Is that all?" Lennon had formed an idea of a

vast heap of debt crushing Warton down — something hopeless to struggle against. His own treasure from the underworld — a very little treasure at the best when compared with what Waterdale rumour had given it out to be — had been diminishing rather rapidly of late. But a thousand or twelve hundred pounds would not much affect it either way; and he was not going to let poor Mabel Warton's husband remain in the hands of the Philistines for that much.

"I think I can settle this matter, Eastham, — if I may put it into your hands. I have a few pounds just now which I don't want particularly — in fact I don't know well what to do with them; and I should be glad to help Warton out of his difficulty. Will you arrange the matter? May I trouble you so far?"

"My dear fellow, I shall be delighted; I am going to town in a few days: but I'll write up at once, and I shall be only too happy to have the conduct of the business. See if I don't talk stoutly to some of the creditors, and compel them to compound."

"One condition I must make, and I am quite earnest in making it — Warton must not know this comes from me."

"Certainly not, if you wish it."

"I do wish it most particularly. There are reasons just now which might render it unpleasant for Warton, or any of his family, to suppose they were under what

they might be sensitive enough to consider a sort of obligation to me."

"He shall know nothing of it, depend upon that — at least for the present. I am sure, before long, he will be in a position to repay you. He has great talent, and I think the best thing he could do would be to go back to his own profession, and stick to it like a man. And then, after a while, he might come into the House, as so many lawyers do, and become Attorney-general one of these days. I don't know why he shouldn't."

Lennon was not so sanguine of the future of his old friend. He had lost all faith in Warton's career. He had seen through the brilliant shallowness of his mind, and had seen too that his nature as well as his mind was shallow. All the steadfastness and fixed purpose, without which even genius can hardly succeed, and by the help of which mediocrity can so often climb where genius fails to reach — all this was wanting to Walter Raleigh Warton, and Lennon knew it; but he expressed no such doubts to Captain Eastham, who had still a sort of generous faith in the gifts and the prospects of the orator of the working class.

"I am glad I spoke of this to you," said Eastham, as they were parting; "I never thought though of expecting a helping hand from you. In fact, to speak the truth, I was quite under the impression that this Freehold Land Company of yours, or whatever it is"

— and Eastham waved his hand in the direction of the model village — “had let you in rather heavily, and left you somewhat in the condition that Epsom and Ascot have left me. I am glad to find that philanthropy, after all, is a less ruinous weakness than horse-racing. Providence does reward virtue, I now see; and as a religious member of the Conservative party I rejoice at the sight, although it profits me nothing.”

This conversation took place on the road near the model village, which was now the centre whither tended all men and women and organisations destined to relieve the wants of the poorest victims of the flood. The road was now wholly passable once more. The lake had receded back to little more than the dimensions of its original basin; the torrent that ran down the pass was a brook again; the river was beginning to flow more tranquilly to the sea; and there seemed every hope that before many days no greater relic of the flood would be left behind than a few ruined hovels and a few graves. But these hopes were deceived; bad had begun, but worse remained behind.

That very night Lennon went alone through the village. He was thinking sadly enough over part of the conversation he had had with Eastham. The few words dropped by the latter about Grace Ethelstone had fallen on his heart as the cold drops in the water-torture fall on the miserable prisoner's shorn head.

He turned over in his mind with the curiosity of bitterness the slight and passing phrase in which Eastham expressed his doubt whether he, Lennon, had ever noticed her. So much we know of each other! So sympathetic are we with our friends! So quick are we to see each other's sufferings! Lennon's heart was burnt with love for that girl; his life was rendered all a barrenness and a blank hideous sand-desert by her rejection of him; he chafed at the mean regularity with which the routine of his existence dragged on in darkness after its sun had all gone out: and his friend now coolly asked him whether he had ever noticed the girl, and did not even trouble himself to wait for an answer.

As he passed one of the cottages a low moaning sound fell painfully on his ear. He stopped and listened. It was not the sharp cry of a child; it was the monotonous moan of a suffering adult. A light burned in one of the windows. Lennon looked at the cottage, and studying its position and size, endeavoured to recollect who it was that had been housed there. The cottage was one of the very smallest; and with all the pressure that the flood had put upon them he knew that Tom Berry and his coadjutors had been careful not to overcrowd the little buildings. Evidently this was one of the cottages into which only a single family, and that a small one, could have been received. He came to the conclusion that the family in this cottage was that

of a poor fellow, a basket-maker, who had a wife and three little children, and who had lost everything but the clothes they wore when the flood washed over their miserable bedrooms. Lennon had noticed the sickly and broken look of the poor fellow that very morning. The moaning still kept on; and Lennon thought of tapping at the door and asking if there was anybody sick, when the door was opened, and the basket-maker's wife stood on the threshold and looked wildly up and down the road and at the adjoining cottages, which were now all silent and dark. Lennon went towards her: she knew him at once.

"O, Mr. Lennon, my poor oald man be very bad. He been gan clean wrang i's heid. He's been mooanin' an ravin', an's oot o' his senses, an' I fear he's nigh on to deeth. O, what shall I do! I doant know nowte to do, or how to send for doctor."

"Don't be alarmed," said Lennon; "perhaps he's just a little feverish. I'll go and fetch a doctor."

"O, God bless ye! for I can't leave the childer. Ooar eldest girl's hardly nene; stiddy aneuf, but too yung to go or to leave."

"May I look at your husband first?"

"O, coom in, coom in."

She caught Lennon's hand and dragged him in. There indeed was a sorry sight. The poor basket-maker was moaning, tossing, and talking on the bed that had been made up for him. His cheeks were

afire; his unresting skinny hands were burning. He was in high fever. The children in their night-dresses were standing or squatting about, bewildered and scared. For them Nature had upset herself altogether during the last few days, and it now seemed their fate to be always roused from their beds at night with flood or fever or other calamity. They were all too much dazed and frightened to cry.

Lennon looked significantly at the children. "Better dress these, and have them removed out of this as quickly as possible."

"O, then it's fever my poor oald man's took with, and he'll die!"

"No, no; don't be afraid. He'll come all right again; but it's better to get the little ones out of the way, lest it spread. Keep up your courage; you'll nurse your husband and bring him safely through, never fear. I'll go for the doctor, and I'll send someone to help you."

Lennon's thoughts hardly beat time to the encouraging tune of his words. He feared of all things an outbreak of fever in the present state of affairs, with a disheartened crowd of women and children pent almost pell-mell into a few rows of cottages, and the beneficent resources of Waterdale nearly played out. He first found out Tom Berry, and set him to waken up some of the refugees somewhere and get shelter for the poor

little children. Then he went home, startled old Mr. and Mrs. Beck out of their sleep, bade them get what they could in the way of nourishment and medicaments that might be useful in fever, extinguished somewhat savagely, it may be owned, a few rising grumbles on their part; then made his way to the stable, saddled his own horse, and dashed off to the town to find a doctor. "O for the helping brain and hand of some earnest energetic woman!" he thought as he sped upon his mission.

He made the doctor mount his horse at once and ride off, while he waited until the physician's steady old servant had saddled his steady old cob, on which Lennon returned. The poor basket-maker was in typhus fever. So was one of the children already. The other two were housed among the neighbours, who only contended with each other for the task of sheltering and caring for them.

"It's a bad case," said the doctor to Lennon as they stood on the road together; "and that's not the worst of the matter — the fever will spread."

"Yes; that is just what I feared."

"It will be all over these houses in a day or two, Mr. Lennon. We'll do our best; but how can we prevent it? It's idle to talk of removing them. There's no place to remove them to. This is by far the best place they can be in. The fact is that it has broken

out already on the other side, in the town, down among the lanes where the flood was worst."

The doctor remained at Lennon's house for the rest of that night, to be quite ready for the work that had to be done. His forebodings came but too true. In twenty-four hours a virulent typhus was raging among Lennon's villagers. It was indeed, as the doctor had said, on both sides of the lake, and certainly far worse in the town than on Lennon's side. But here, too, it was bad indeed, and for a time it seemed as if there must be one dead in every house. The medical resources of Waterdale were poor and small; and the workhouse-hospital was quickly filled, until it began to be found out that the patients there died considerably faster than anywhere else, and then their friends fought against allowing sick people to enter the dreaded walls. All effort to prevent the fever from spreading proved futile. The incessant rains of the spring and summer, the soaked earth, the ruined grain, the consequent depression and want of work, and want of food, and poverty; and then the floods, the terror and the desolation — had made the place a rank garden, manured and watered for fever to flourish in. And so it flourished. The sick died fast, and panic demoralised the living. Strangely enough, the poor basket-maker, the first stricken down, and perhaps the feeblest of all, recovered. It is not strange, perhaps, though it seemed perfectly wonderful to many of the people, that Lennon,

who showed the most utter disregard of all considerations for his personal safety, and went about as freely through fever-beds as the doctors and the nurses, was wholly untouched.

CHAPTER IX.

Known too late.

"OUR friend Alwyn has been telling me that you were dreadfully unpopular down here not long ago."

"So I was. I think I had some months of as much unpopularity as the sourest cynic could desire. Of course it was for the most part of a passive kind."

"But it sometimes became demonstrative and active, did it not?"

"Yes, a little. Once or twice. But it came to nothing."

"Alwyn tells me that some orthodox zealot made an attempt to set your model village on fire?"

"Well, there was something of the kind conjectured, or found out, or supposed to be found out. Tom Berry made the discovery — or thinks he did — in time. Certainly, he found that four of the houses were on fire at one moment, with heaps of dry straw and shavings and resin carefully adjusted; and it did look a little as if some too ardent opponent had made up his mind to rid the earth of our cumbering presence."

"Had you any reason to suspect who the fellows were that did it?"

"Yes, I think so. In truth, I believe it was all the doing of one man."

"And you took no steps to punish him?"

"None whatever."

"Did he cut the country?"

"No; he is laid up now, poor fellow. We were in his house to-day. He is, I have good reason to know, one of those who were hurt when the rush of the flood brought down some crazy houses in the outskirts of the town yonder."

"Then where is he now?"

"In one of the cottages."

"Your cottages?"

"Yes. His wife and two children are there."

"Why, that is dramatic or poetic justice indeed — that is heaping coals of fire on his head."

"Coals of fever fire are heaped on the poor creature's head now. He seems to me to have been a decent sort of fellow, half crazed with religious fervour. He was a believer in the Millennium; and I fancy he got it into his head somehow that my poor building speculation was a subtle scheme for the dissemination of materialism and flat blasphemy."

"Don't you feel tired of this place altogether, Lennon? Don't you find your labour all thrown away — don't you get sick of the silliness and changeableness of the people, and inclined to cut the place and never come back?"

"Sometimes I do; perhaps not wholly for the reasons you suggest. I am not ashamed to confess that I feel, or felt, disappointed at the result of my luckless scheme. I never anticipated any of the objections raised to it. I surveyed beforehand in my mind what I thought all the possible kinds of failure that might await it; but the particular sort of failure that befell it never once occurred to me as on the cards."

The speakers were Ralph Lennon and Captain Eastham. They stood at an open window of Lennon's house, and smoked. It was late — past midnight. They could see the lake and the lights in the little village, which but lately was so lonely, and now had become so populous. It had become so thickly peopled indeed that Lennon was thinking of making arrangements to turn his own house, with the exception of two or three rooms, into a sort of caravanserai, to receive any wandering Waterdale people for whom the cottages could not provide. Captain Eastham and he had worked pretty hard already, and were now enjoying a quiet cigar and solitude.

"Now you are quite popular," Eastham remarked — "a sort of hero, in fact, among your neighbours."

"Yes; and for no conceivable merit of mine. My building scheme has turned out serviceable in a way I never anticipated, or could possibly have dreamed of; and I get the honour of it."

"You bear your honours meekly, and seem to

understand the secret and value of popularity almost as well as if you had been half your life in Parliament. By the way, Lennon, why don't you go into Parliament?"

"My dear fellow, what on earth do I want there? What could I do there?"

"Well, of course, I don't mean to talk nonsense to you about serving your country and all that kind of thing. But I really think you might make a figure there. Let us put you up for some place here while your local popularity lasts."

"Let *us*? — whom do you mean, pray, by *us*?"

"Our people, of course."

"Only I happen to be a Radical."

"The very thing we want just now; we are dying for Radicals. I tell you, my good fellow, there is more joy among us over one converted Radical than over no end of faithful and consistent Conservatives."

"Very likely. But I am not a convert, and don't ever mean to be. I mean to die impenitent, Eastham, so far as Radicalism is concerned. I wait for the time when my own views or crotchets get a chance, which time will come; meanwhile, you have my friend Warton."

"No; Warton's played out, I fear — for the present, at least. But that reminds me I have had a good deal of talk lately with your friend and faithful follower

below, Mr. Berry; and he has partly opened my eyes to something that was a little mystery to me before. I always knew there was an organised opposition to Warton over at Northinglen that night; but I never could quite understand how it was got up. Now I think I have discovered that your friend Berry was at the bottom of it all."

Lennon laughed. "I suspected as much — divined it in some way or other; but I never cared to ask. Tom has a deadly enmity to Warton."

"Yes: and he wreaked it there. *Pallas te hoc vulnere — Pallas immolat.* As I understand, the game was to frighten Warton off the ground, and by Jove I think it succeeded. I never saw a fellow more scared. His health is weak, I believe; and he has not seemed like his old self this long time back. I am sorry for it — and for his present fix; which, however, thanks to your helping hand, we may now look on as nearly over. With a fresh start, and in a new direction, he may do well yet."

"He may," said Lennon very drily; "I think with you that he had better turn to his profession and work at it, and nourish some other ambition than that of getting out of his class."

Eastham looked quickly round at Lennon, was about to say something, then stammered, turned away, and knocked the ashes off his cigar.

"Come, you were going to say something," said Lennon, smiling; "say it."

"Well, I don't know. Yes, perhaps I was. You won't mind me, I hope?"

"Not in the least."

"Then what on earth, Lennon, do you mean by talking of his class, and your class, and my class, and so on? I don't understand it, I give you my word. You have said that sort of thing many times, already — twice to-day, I think. You are just the opposite to Warton. He gets as uneasy if anybody uses the word class when he is present as if his father had been hanged, and somebody were talking of a rope. What do you mean by people going out of their class? What's your class — what's my class? I suppose we are all gentlemen; and I don't see — excuse me even for suggesting the thing; it looks so like impertinence; but it's your own fault, old fellow — I don't see what difference there is between you and me, except that you have a good deal more money and a great deal more brains, and that you know how to make use of both, which I don't."

Lennon felt a little embarrassed. He had talked hastily and inadvertently of "class" difference, because it must be owned that subject was sharply printed on his mind. One of his weaknesses was to remember too keenly the slights, or fancied slights, which had been put upon himself and his father years ago by the

Cumberland gentry. But he felt ashamed of having betrayed a weakness which he acknowledged to himself had something of meanness in it. The word having been spoken, however, he did not intend to recall it.

"I think there are classes in this country, Eastham; and I think nobody fights his way from one into the other without losing a good deal of his self-respect on the road. I cannot help seeing that the intruder is snubbed by those among whom he pushes himself, and girded at by those he leaves behind; and I don't want to be in the rush, and am sorry to see anyone I care for drawn into it."

"Exactly. That's all very well as a general description or a general precept. We English are a jealous and grudging lot involuntarily. The man in always scowls or growls at the man coming in. Nobody gets into an omnibus without seeing that those already in look at him as much as to ask, 'What the devil brings *you* here?' Same thing in a coffee-room, in any place where there are chance comers — except, perhaps, the stalls of a theatre, where everyone has his own seat divided off for him, and his nearest neighbour cannot intrude. So it is with what you call classes, and nothing more. I believe in my soul that all that sort of thing people talk about classes is just like the old nonsense about the bloated aristocrat. I believe, too, it is your fault — excuse me if I identify you for

the moment with the grumblers — much more than ours. Warton was very sensitive about his confounded class. I believe his father was a working man, but I never met anybody who cared three straws about the matter. Take my word for it, Lennon, all that sort of thing is out of date, and has no real place but in the *London Journal* or the Surrey Theatre."

Lennon shook his head. "Your own political chief, your adored leader, is evidence the other way," he said. "You told me yourself how hard it is to get your party to follow him."

"Yes: but it is just because they can't quite make him out, because he is not like them; I suppose it's the old question between genius and mediocrity. He is hardly an Englishman, and he puzzles our heavy people; and they have a vague notion that there must be something wrong with him, as they have about a French novel or German theology. Class, as you call it, has next to nothing to do with it; how could it? Half our modern peers had tradesmen for their fathers, and the sons of the other half are going into business in the City."

Lennon laughed. "I am ashamed to argue the point, Eastham; it seems so weak and childish to think of such things at all. It looks as if a man was afraid of himself, and jealous of those who hailed from a different class."

"There goes your class again; confound your

class! I tell you, my good fellow, there is no such thing in the antiquated sense you take up. You have lived too long at the other end of the earth, and you don't understand how common sense has gone ahead here in your absence. Let us say no more about it—only, believe me, you are under an obsolete delusion. I saw this in you many times; I saw how obstinately you kept away from the people round about here — the bloated aristocrats, you know — fellows, for the most part, who would have been delighted to know you, and would have understood you at least as well as your bricklayers and tramps and orthodox fire-raisers; only you would not look at them, but kept rigidly to yourself and bade everybody stand off. You won't speak to us, you scowl at us if we come near you; and then you insist that nobody in England will be received if he goes out of his class. I don't mean you in your own proper person, but you as the typical Briton of the Radical school, who is quite proud of the notion that he can repel the pampered minions of what-do-you-call-it."

And after this long exposition Captain Eastham took a draught of brandy-and-water, lighted a fresh cigar, and looked at his friend for reply or confession of defeat. Lennon said nothing; both laughed, and presently passed on to the previous question.

After some further talk about nothing in particular, Eastham, for whom a carriage had long been waiting,

took leave of his friend, promising to return and be his helper in the present stress as soon as he possibly could. Next day he was going to London, as a great party fight was coming off in Parliament, and Eastham's friends were now enjoying the rare delights of office, and naturally very anxious not to be robbed of them all too soon. But he promised that the moment his chief, to whose personal attendance he devoted himself, could spare him from the House, he would return to Waterdale; and he really meant this at the time.

This conversation was one of a good many which took place about this time between Lennon and his Tory friend. Lennon found himself of late growing more and more to like Eastham. There was a certain fresh and frank simplicity in the latter, which his natural shrewdness and intimate knowledge of the world of London only set off to greater advantage. Eastham, on his side, had readily seen the good qualities, the ability, the manly, true nature that lay beneath the crust of Lennon's shy and proud reserve. So, not having one single opinion on any vital question in common, not mingling in the same spheres, — brought together only as two circles might be, just at one point, and reuniting nowhere else, — they respected each other, liked each other's ways and talk, and were, indeed, much better friends than old associates or social colleagues often are.

The conversation just related had noticed one

change that lately came over Lennon's life. He had been, as we know, unpopular, even odious, in Waterdale. When his unpopularity culminated — for example, about the time preceding his last visit to London — a Sassenach landlord, newly come into a Fenian county, could hardly have been an object of more open and sincere dislike. It was quite true that there had been an attempt to burn down the poor Phalanstery; but that attempt Lennon thought little of, as it was really the work only of one half-crazy fanatic who had gotten it somehow into his head that anything connected with secular and undenominational instruction was likely to put off the Millennium. The general and open repugnance exhibited towards Ralph and his henchman on both sides of the lake would have been hard to bear under ordinary circumstances. Of late Lennon bore it very composedly, and sometimes even could not help finding fault with himself for his indifference. For the cause was only too patent. He found himself armed against popular enmity in a panoply of his own personal emotions. The populace hissed him, and he cared nothing for the hisses because he thought of Grace Ethelstone, and wondered whether she loved him. His philanthropy was shot dead by a glance from a girl's eye. His stoicism against public opprobrium was nothing higher or stronger than an absence of interest in anything but the woman whose simple, unaffected nature had fascinated him. The Knight of

the Gentle Armour, who faced without fear the lances of his adversaries while he wore no stronger cuirass than his mistress's garment, might, in one sense, be a type and illustration of the kind of courage and constancy with which Ralph Lennon had confronted the worst that could be done by the public opinion of his Waterdale neighbours. He was hated, but he was hopeful and happy.

Now all had changed. Nobody in Waterdale was any longer to be compared with him in popular favour. The people adored him. The long, true, disinterested service and labour of Dr. Alwyn counted for the moment as nothing when compared with the impulsive exertions and easy sacrifices of Lennon. It was quite true, as Eastham had said, that the gentry of the place were filled with sincere admiration for the individual whom, a few weeks before, one of the number had pleasantly talked of as "the returned convict," and "the ticket-of-leave man." There was not a hall or castle for many miles round which would not have welcomed him eagerly among its guests. Distant Carlisle and Kendal were familiar with him, and claimed him as a local hero. Preston had frequently made allusion to him in the leading article of its most influential newspaper; nay, his fame had actually reached Liverpool; and a paragraph in a Manchester daily paper — a paper having a circulation of ever so many thousands, and positively read in the Reform Club and the library

of the House of Commons — had talked of him as a possible candidate in the Liberal interest for a northern borough.

He bore his popularity as he had borne [the ill-favour of the public. He did not care anything about it. He scarcely heeded it, or knew much of it; and when it came in his way he quietly repelled it and bade it stand aside. It was of no avail to him. His house was as lonely as before; his heart was far more lonely, for its great hope was gone. The kind of life he led naturally favoured, and even compelled, a meditation, and brooding, and self-questioning which made that life, sad as it was, even more morbid; and he was beginning gradually to lose any faith in himself, his own purposes, and his own nature, as he more and more clearly saw how much of selfishness there was at the root of everything he had done. It was to relieve his own mind, to perform a sort of penance in fact, that he had gone to work at his philanthropic scheme in Waterdale. When the scheme failed he bore its failure with the apparent composure of a hero and a philosopher. Why? Because by the time failure became apparent, he had nearly lost all deep interest whatever in the project or the place, and found his heart wholly occupied by the love of a girl. Then, when there came another chance of utilising his resources and doing some good, he set to work chiefly that he might relieve his own mind of the weight of

personal disappointment cast upon him when his love was repelled. At the present moment he could not conceal from himself that his heart was so filled with Grace Ethelstone as to have hardly any room left for deep and true feeling on any other subject. He looked upon the suffering that was all around him almost as a preoccupied spectator looks on a picture or a stage-play. He moved about, and worked, and projected, and did this for one sufferer, that for another, in a perfunctory and absent sort of manner, his heart not being in the thing at all. And he had the manliness to be ashamed of this. When anyone praised him — and most were ready to praise him now — he rejected or evaded the compliments, and felt humbled and shamed by them. He sometimes thought of the old story of the monk supposed to have died in the odour of sanctity, and whose corpse, laid in its yet open coffin near the altar, amid the incense and the chanting of the almost adoring brethren, suddenly sat up, reanimated for a moment by the returning soul, and proclaimed in awful tones to the horrified listeners the just condemnation of him whom they revered.

So it followed that Lennon was as lonely as he ever had been. He suffered acutely when alone, and yet could endure but little companionship. Be it understood that his feelings made no public show, and one should have known him very well indeed to know that any inward pain consumed him. Demonstrative people

have an immense advantage in so far as they can give their emotions head, and let them tire themselves out, as a man of sense when his horse runs away with him takes care to let the animal have all the running he wants, and more, and so finds him easy enough to deal with before long. Lennon hardly ever gave his emotions head of late years, and so the strong passion which now possessed him threatened to outlast his time. It would have been a relief to him if he could storm and rage against fate and everything else now as in the old days; but he could not. For he now blamed fate no more, but only his own weakness altogether; and he was ashamed of himself that any passion could have so conquered him, any disappointment so stricken him down.

He walked up and down his room the night after Eastham had left him, smoking and thinking, and sometimes glancing anxiously out of the window down at the cottages. Tom Berry had promised to come up to the house and tell him how things were going before betaking himself finally to his own rest for the night. Lennon began to grow uneasy because his follower did not come. He looked at his watch and found that it was one o'clock. He wondered whether anything evil could have befallen Tom, and was resolving to go and look for him, because Tom's punctuality in general was such that his delaying beyond a prescribed time was quite a matter for surprise or

alarm. Just as Ralph had made up his mind that he really must go, he heard at last a step on the damp, clayey, grass-grown soil of what might have been a lawn or a garden in front of the house. He looked out, and saw a dark figure hurrying up. He went out and opened the door, — Mr. and Mrs. Beck had been comfortably in bed for hours, — and he admitted Tom Berry. Tom looked pale and disturbed.

"Well, Tom, how are things going now?"

"Bad, very bad," replied Tom, shaking his head. "I don't rightly see how they could be looking much worse. I don't know what some of these poor creatures are to do. It's dreadful to hear the women going on, and the children. Well, he's dead."

"Who is dead?"

"That poor chap with his Millennium — the poor buffer that wanted to burn us out. God help him! He's gone. I've just left his wife, and she's like one out of her mind."

"Poor fellow, and poor woman — far more to be lamented than he."

"O, yes, he's right enough, bless you; and he took it all very well, and died as happy as a chap could be, talking such awful nonsense about his Millennium that it would bring the tears into your eyes to hear the half of it. I was with him to the last. We had become great friends latterly, we had."

"Had he his senses?"

"In the end, yes; an' he knew me right well, an' told me he'd meet me in heaven some day, though I didn't believe in the Millennium; which was a deal more liberal of him, sir, after all, than a good many of our friends in these parts would be, under the circumstances. I didn't mind *him* much, but the sight of the wife and the kids rather knocked me over."

Tom's pale face looked quite that of one who had been a good deal knocked over.

"Take some brandy-and-water, Tom; it will revive you. This is a sad business."

Tom helped himself to a little brandy-and-water — a very little; he was the feeblest of drinkers, although he always scouted teetotalism.

"Yes, it's a sad business, Mr. Lennon, and one doesn't get used to it, somehow. I thought, after a few days of hard experience one wouldn't mind it much, but I don't find that it comes anything the easier. I wonder how long it takes to season a grave-digger, or an undertaker, or an 'ospital nurse?"

Lennon was not in a position to give any statistical information on this subject.

"I think, Tom," he said, after a moment's silence, "I had better go down and see if there is anything to be done for that poor woman and her children."

"Nothing to be done for them to-night," replied Tom authoritatively. "I've seen to all that can be done — it ain't much, poor things; and there's no need

of your going down at this hour. Don't you be overdoing the business, sir. It strikes me you've done quite as much as is good for you, or for any of us, already."

"How so, Tom?"

"Well, I don't quite know; but you don't look just like yourself lately. I've noticed it for days back; you've been working too hard, and not having sleep enough, and going into all kinds of danger. Now don't you keep on in that way. *You'll* be getting fever next; and then what are we to do?"

"Not I, Tom. Persons like me don't come to any harm in these matters; only poor fellows with wives and large families succumb, I think."

Tom shook his head gravely. "Seems like that certainly," he said, "as things go; but a man mus'n't rely too much upon that, even though he thinks nobody would miss him. But we should all miss you; and so you ought to take care of yourself."

"My good fellow, I do take care of myself. I have been here quietly for a couple of hours drinking brandy-and-water with Captain Eastham, while you were looking after the sick. If that be not taking care of myself, tell me what is."

The sound of Captain Eastham's name set Tom off on a new track.

"He's a good fellow, Captain Eastham," Berry observed; "a very good fellow for a Tory and a swell. I

didn't think I could ever like one of that class so well. There's something open about him, and generous, and liberal. I wonder if there are many of the lot like him."

"What lot?"

"Well, the Tory lot — the aristocrat lot. I don't think there can be —"

"I daresay there are some tolerably decent fellows among the Tories, Tom."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Tom meditatively. "Perhaps there are. I suppose half these fellows don't really know that they are keeping the working men of England out of their rights."

"I suppose they don't, Tom. I don't think Captain Eastham would knowingly keep anybody out of his rights."

"But they are," interjected Tom, looking almost severely towards his patron.

"Are — what?"

"Keeping the working men of England out of their rights — aren't they?"

"Well, Tom, I think the working men of England have not got all their rights yet. I don't quite know who is most to blame for it; but I think Eastham a fine liberal fellow for a Tory."

"O, so do I. He spoke to me the other day about Northinglen and the election. We had a deal of talk over it; and I think he managed to get out of me

something about the way that little lot was managed, and Wat Warton done out of his chance."

"Yes, Tom, so he told me. Indeed, I thought I saw your handiwork pretty plainly in that business. I don't know that it was all quite fair."

"Why not, Mr. Lennon? Whose fault was it if he hadn't the pluck to persevere? If he'd had the heart of a cock-sparrow he'd have carried all before him. *You'd* have had it all your own way, I'll wager, if you'd been in his place — or Captain Eastham either."

Lennon felt a certain sort of compunction at having been in any way, though never so indirectly, a sharer in the overthrow and humiliation of his old school-fellow. Truly, except in having imported the irrepressible Tom Berry into the neighbourhood, he had literally nothing to do with the business; but he could not help feeling a twinge of regret that even in that remote and unconscious way he had contributed to Walter Warton's discomfiture and damage. He turned back to the immediate question of their present lives.

"Then you think there is nothing to be done to-night, Tom, for anybody in the cottages?"

"Not a thing. We must wait and see what to-morrow'll bring. It's a bad business altogether, and I wonder who'll see the end of it."

There was a tone of despondency about Tom as he spoke these words which smote painfully on Lennon's

ears. Tom was usually so full of courage and good heart, so resolute to make the best of everything in ordinary life, — perhaps because his way was to make the worst of everything in politics, — that any expression of doubt or dread came with a peculiar and ominous significance from him. Lennon looked keenly at him. As they stood now, Tom was near the door, just where he had come in; and the lamp, the only lamp in the room, was so placed that its light fell on Lennon, and Tom was left in shadow. Lennon quickly but quietly changed his position, and placed himself where he could see Berry's face plainly, and study its expression. Tom was looking down now and gently beating his hands together — the back of one in the palm of the other — as he repeated almost unconsciously the words: "It's a bad business altogether; I wonder who'll see the end of it?" His face was usually colourless, but just now there was a kind of transparent pallor over it; and his forehead was damp, and his mouth was quivering and twitching. He looked up suddenly, with eyes of unnatural brightness, and caught Lennon's uneasy expression. Lennon was a little embarrassed at being thus caught. Tom shuffled his feet, and twisted his fingers, and made a grand effort to look very cheerful.

"Take a little more brandy, Tom," said Lennon.

"No, thank ye, sir; I'd rather not. I — I feel so very well — so very well!"

A deeper shade came over Lennon's face. He did not like to hear such an uncalled-for and spontaneous assurance on Tom's part that he was so very well.

"And now, sir, I think I'd better be going."

"I think you had much better stay here to-night, Tom. There is a bed to spare, you know, such as it is."

"Don't mention it; no, no. I'd much better go. I'll be wanted down there at all hours in the morning; and I ought to be at my post."

"But are you sure you are all right? are you quite sure that you are perfectly well?"

"Lord bless you, yes! Never better in my life. You don't imagine anything is going to happen to *me*, sir? Not a bit of it. I'm a seasoned old hand; sickness don't ever think of minding me, because it knows I don't mind it. What's going on down yonder" (and he pointed in the direction of the village) "is nothing, one might say. You should have seen some of our courts in Southwark in fever time; and them even I'm told are nothing to Shoreditch and Bethnal Green. There you might talk of sickness, where there's neither air nor water. Here, why bless you it's nothing!"

Tom's own argumentative power, as usual, somewhat brightened him up, and he began to look more brisk and cheery. Lennon hoped the fears he had been entertaining were only vague. Yet he would

have pressed his brother-labourer not to leave the house, but that, in the first place, he thought it might be a very unwise thing to communicate his fears to Tom; and in the next place, Tom was in some ways as obstinate as a mule, and when once he thought he ought to be somewhere, or to do something, argument and exhortation were wholly thrown away upon him. So Lennon did not attempt to resist Tom's determination to return to his post, which post was part of a cottage, now more than half occupied by a poor family, of whom Tom was patron and care-taker.

Tom went away, and whistled as he went — not for want of thought, nor to keep up his spirits, but to give Lennon the notion of a man positively exuberant with health and strength.

"He was uneasy about me," thought Tom as he trudged rather heavily along. "I saw it at once: but it's all nonsense. I'm a little tired and queer, that's the whole of it. In the morning I'll be all right — I think. I'm not going to give in and take fright for a bit of a cold shiver, anyhow; but it's kind of him. Ah, I wish I saw *him* looking a good deal better than he does now. I hope he's not going to get knocked over. No; I don't think it's that is wrong with him — not that sort of fever. Who'd 'ave thought he'd take such a thing to heart so?"

So, pursuing his thought, whatever it was, as to the reason for Lennon's altered condition, Tom reached

his home, opened his door as softly as he could, and crept quietly in. He felt very faint and queer, and the moment he got into bed fell into an odd, unrefreshing, semi-lethargic kind of sleep, in which he seemed to be half-awake and to be talking to himself all the night through.

When Berry left the house, Lennon looked after him until he wholly disappeared in the darkness. Then Ralph returned to the room in which Tom had found him; and he began pacing up and down as before. "I fear that poor fellow has been over-exerting himself of late," he thought. "I hope nothing bad is going to happen to him. What an unselfish being he is! What a rebuke and reproach he is to most of us! I never thought about him these last few days, or how he might overtask himself, or what danger he might be in; because my mind was filled with my own trumpery grievances and disappointments. That's a regular genuine hero — that poor fellow; and he does not know anything about it himself; and who appreciates him or cares for him? Not I, certainly, seeing that I never heeded for days back what became of him. Truly I have reason to be proud of myself, and I do well to set up for philanthropy and beneficence, and all the rest of it — I who could have seen all around me go to ruin so long as I thought Grace Ethelstone cared for me! — I who, while half a village is dying close at hand, can hardly bring my mind to think of anything but my own dis-

appointment because that child could not be talked into loving me."

He leaned out of the window, and looked long and thoughtfully down upon the village. The lights were all extinguished there now; but a late moon was arisen, and the white walls shone in her rays. Every house could be seen separately, surrounded as it was with its little special garden and enclosure, which Lennon had hoped to find one day all blooming and happy. He had gone to work to make a little terrestrial paradise, a tiny health-island and Happy Valley; and behold it had come to be useful at last — in the capacity of a fever hospital! It would require some heart, he thought, to bear quite up against such satirical strokes of fate. But a model village turning into a lazar-house is perhaps a fitting appanage for an elderly philosopher who falls in love, is disappointed, and turns into a maundering fool.

CHAPTER X.

Myra makes a Discovery, and profits by it.

MYRA ALWYN and her husband were active with the earliest and the best of those who did battle against the pestilence. But their efforts were for the most part confined to their own side of the lake — to the town; and Lennon saw but little of them. Tom Berry, who often had to go into the town, made enthusiastic reports of them, and seemed ready to admit that the hired priest of a State Church might be a brave man, a charitable man, and a Christian.

Myra always welcomed a word from stout Tom Berry, for whom she had come to have a high admiration, and who actually began to feel a sort of veneration for her, fine lady though she was. And as he always told her something of Lennon's doings, even if only a dozen words passed between them, she knew that her distant fellow-soldier in the fight was still on his feet, unhurt and active.

But there came an interval during which she saw nothing of Tom Berry. Days passed away without his making his appearance, and she began to grow uneasy. It was a strange thing that she could not bring herself

to speak to her husband on the subject, and ask him to go and see if his friend Lennon was ill.

One evening — an evening she remembered long after — she came home late and tired and melancholy. She had been to see some sick families, and felt weak and dispirited, so much so that Dr. Alwyn insisted on her returning home, and leaving him to make other visits alone. He promised her that he would endeavour not to be late. She sat in the library where he generally wrote and worked, and where he and she sometimes had tea of evenings when they were alone. It seemed less dismal now to sit there than in the large and dreary drawing-room. It was a dull heavy evening of late summer. She sat idly over a cup of tea that was growing cold, and longed for her husband to come home, and wondered if she was going to take fever, and wondered if Lennon was sick.

The maid who came into the room when she rang for lights looked so big with some piece of news, that Myra at once said:

“Well, Jane, what is it?”

“Please, ma’am, David” (the groom) “says there’s someone sick at Mr. Lennon’s.”

“I knew it!” exclaimed Myra, standing up, all flushed and trembling. “Who told David; what does he know about it?”

“Well, ma’am, he says he met somebody who told him that the fever was at Mr. Lennon’s, and that old

Mr. Beck and Mrs. Beck ran away with fright; and he saw Mr. Beck afterwards, and Mr. Beck would not wait to tell him anything, but only said if people brought fever into the house when they needn't do so, he and his missis weren't going to be cut off for anybody."

"What brutes!"

"Yes, ma'am. I always thought Mrs. Beck a hard-hearted bad old woman, ma'am, after the way she went on to poor Bessie, her niece."

Myra stood for a few seconds irresolute, and with beating heart. She looked at her watch. She saw that she could hardly expect her husband back for two hours. "Too long to wait — too long," she said to herself. "He would be the first himself to blame me if I waited so long. Why should I not go? Were it a common stranger I would not delay half an hour."

Then she turned to the girl:

"Jane, tell David to get my pony at once, and bring it round. Let him not lose a moment — he is to come with me."

She wrote two lines to Alwyn, saying she had heard bad news of Mr. Lennon, and had made up her mind to go and find out the truth for herself, and try to give some help if necessary, and that she hoped to return immediately; and then in five minutes she had on her riding-habit, and was ready to mount her pony.

All melancholy, morbidness, qualmishness, dread of coming fever for herself, had disappeared, swallowed up in the strong excitement and anxiety and the eagerness to give her woman's help in the hour of danger. "There is no one with him," was the thought that came up again and again in her mind. "He is left uncared-for, and he will die, and I did not know of it in time — and I might have saved him."

"It is not wrong to go to him." Thus, too, she told herself as she impelled her spirited little pony faster and faster over the rough and broken road. "It cannot be wrong. I go to him only because he is sick, perhaps is dying, and has no other woman near him. I had conquered all — nearly — before this. I avoided meeting him; I shrank from him; I made him think that I disliked and dreaded him until I saw that he drew back from me, and thought me a cold and narrow-minded and miserable creature. No human eye or intelligence could ever, ever have pierced to my true feelings; and I was penitent even for what I felt and what I could not help. And I *am* penitent, and Heaven knows it, and sees that my motive now is sincere and pure, and will bring me through all trial, and strengthen me not to betray myself, and will forgive my weakness, and teach me to conquer it in the end."

She never for a moment thought of the possibility of anyone but Lennon being the victim of fever in

Lennon's house. Indeed, if the story was true that his old housekeeper had deserted him, there was no one else that she knew of living in the drear old building.

It was now quite dark as she rode through the fever-stricken village, followed by her groom. She rode past many houses where at another time she would have stayed to inquire for some suffering inmate; but now she never drew bridle there. At last she came in sight of Lennon's house. It was desolate as the halls of Balclutha. The fox looking out of the window with the rank grass waving over his head would have seemed quite as natural and appropriate a spectacle there as among the ruins of the Ossianic heroine's natal castle. Only in one window a light twinkled.

Myra dismounted, and motioning to her groom to keep back, she ran up the grass-grown dank stone steps herself, and knocked softly at the door. The dismal echo seemed to reverberate through her own heart. The knock brought no answer. She knocked again a little louder, then again louder still. At last she heard the sound of coming feet, and a heavy tread in the hall, and the door was opened by Ralph Lennon.

In the dusk and gloom she did not at first know who it was, and the confusion of her thoughts dazed her vision. She only saw that a man stood there. It

might be Tom Berry, or the doctor, or anyone but the man who really stood before her. Nor did Ralph at first know who his visitor was. Her broad-leaved cavalier hat quite shadowed her features, and the skirts of her riding-habit, gathered over her arm, confused the outlines of her figure. It was her voice which told her name.

"How is Mr. Lennon?" she asked, almost breathless. "I have heard that he is sick. Is he very ill; and can I do anything?"

"Mrs. Alwyn!"

The blood rushed to Myra's heart and through her cheeks. She could hardly stand with excitement and surprise.

"O, Mr. Lennon! I never thought to see you thus!"

"Why, O why have you come here? Mrs. Alwyn, you must not cross this threshold or stay here a moment; why have you run such risk?"

"I came because they told me — somebody told me — that you were in fever, and that your servants had deserted you. Why should I not come? What is the danger?"

"Fever is here, Mrs. Alwyn; and death, I fear, will shortly be here; and you must not venture into our danger."

"But you are well — I thought to find you dying! And who, then, is sick?"

"My poor friend, my poor faithful friend, Tom Berry. Caring nothing for himself, he is now a victim; and because he only thought of others, so now he is deserted and left alone. Yes, that cowardly and base old man and woman deserted the house because I brought him here."

"Then is there nobody — literally nobody — in the house but you and he?"

"Nobody, since noon to-day. *They* promised to send someone, but no one comes. The people here are debased by their panic terror."

"Thank Heaven I heard what I did, and came!"

"Thank Heaven indeed; and thank you, Mrs. Alwyn, for your courage and your generous kindness. But you must not remain here running useless risks. Enough that you have come; your coming relieves me from a cruel difficulty. *You* will see that proper assistance and attendance are sent; and I shall never forget that you came when no other living creature ventured near. Now, good-bye. No, no, you must not stay."

She had come into the hall. "You do not think I am a child," she said, "or an old woman like Mrs. Beck? You do not suppose I am afraid of fever? By how many fever-bedsides do you think I have been to-day? Can men never understand women?"

"But your husband — what would he think of your exposing yourself to useless danger?"

"I know what my husband would think if he heard that I turned away from the bedside of any human creature whom I could help, because there was a chance of my catching a breath of infection. I know what he would say if he heard such a thing, and believed it; only I know, too, that he couldn't believe it. Pray, Mr. Lennon, don't think you can teach women another kind of principle from that which you practise yourself. You don't do selfish and cowardly things yourself; believe me, neither do I. For the present — that is, until you find a better nurse — I mean to look after poor Tom Berry; and I hope, with Heaven's help, we may bring him safely through."

Myra was now quite too composed and resolute to give the least chance for further remonstrance. She told Lennon, first of all, to let her see poor Tom; and Lennon led the way to the room where his friend was lying. It was Lennon's own bedroom: Myra saw that at a glance, by the books and papers. Tom was tossing from side to side, and was delirious. He was talking now to "Mary," his dead wife, and bidding her keep up her courage, and telling her things would come right enough soon — never fear! Then he was remonstrating with some of his fellows on their apathy and their down-trodden contentedness. Then he spoke as if to Lennon, and said some voluble words in a low tone, of which only a few were intelligible to Myra.

But she heard distinctly — “You take care of him, Mr. Lennon. Never trust anything to Wat Warton. He’s a man to play you a nasty trick some day. Mind what I say.”

The colour came crimson to her face, and she dreaded to look up for a moment.

“How long has he been delirious?” she asked, after a pause.

“Only a few hours. Do you think him in danger, Mrs. Alwyn? O, my poor fellow — my poor, honest, manly Tom Berry! One of the finest creatures I ever knew. I brought him here, Mrs. Alwyn — brought him here to die! Everything has gone wrong with me since I came here; and is this poor fellow now to be a victim?”

Lennon’s emotion was a strange and touching sight to Myra. She had never supposed that he could thus be moved. It filled her with a kind of alarm, and at the same time threw upon her a consolatory and soothing part which she had never expected to have to perform for him. He had always seemed to her so cold and self-contained, that she hardly knew how to deal with him now that he appealed to her in a faltering and husky voice for encouragement and sympathy. She laid her hand gently and soothingly on his arm. Compassion always puts out its hand and touches the object it would heal and strengthen.

“Dear Mr. Lennon, you need not, I am sure, fear

the worst for this poor fellow. You know how many recover every day — after all, only the few die; and poor Tom was always so strong, and, unlike many of our people here, so temperate, that I cannot think there is much fear for him. But you know that we must not stand here lamenting over him. We must do something."

"Yes, yes. What can we do?"

"First, you had better leave me here — I am certainly a better qualified nurse than you; and you take David's horse and go to the dispensary, and get one of the doctors to come at once, and give some directions about a nurse; and, in fact, they'll tell you at the dispensary all about it. David can walk back and tell Dr. Alwyn what has happened; for, indeed, Mr. Lennon, I left a message for my husband which will alarm him. I heard that you were in fever, and I came here at once. Now go."

"And you will remain here alone?"

"Why not? I am not afraid of fever; and if I were, it would be none the less dangerous because somebody remained to take care of me."

Lennon disappeared. He was relieved by being set to do something. He gave Myra's groom her message, and then started on his own mission.

Myra did not fear being alone; the presence of Lennon embarrassed her, although the earnestness of the duty she had undertaken swallowed up convention-

ality and small feelings of any kind. She had had, even before the present outbreak of pestilence, some experience of fever-beds, and she knew there was nothing to do for Tom Berry just now but to keep him cool and give him water, and let the pure air from the hills breathe in now and then through an opened window. It was melancholy work, however, sitting by that bedside in the lonely summer night, with the darkness of the mountains glooming through the panes; until at last a sad white moon came up, and, gliding on like a Banshee, almost startled Myra at first with its livid sepulchral light. "Pale angel of destruction," the Aladdin of the Northern poet calls the moon as it looks in upon him through the bars of his prison. Myra, watching by the bedside of a fevered man, felt the full meaning of the words. The sad luminous face gazing in seemed to her excited fancy like that of the death-angel come to look upon the ruin he was doomed to make.

Tom Berry broke out every now and then into a fresh outburst of semi-articulate talk. There was a great deal about Lennon in it, and about Warton — and at last Myra caught her own name.

"Tell you again, he is a downright scoundrel! Don't you see the way he follows *her* — Mrs. Alwyn, Parson Alwyn's wife? She's a brick of a woman, too, though I took her for a fool once; and she has spirit enough to cow Wat Warton if ever he shows himself

to her in his true colours. I see it — I understand 'em all; I understand Mr. Lennon, and I'm proud to know him. Something's wrong with him now — can't think what it is; that girl must have refused him — like her impudence! He's mad about her — I saw it long ago. He never speaks a word — O, no; he has no talk; but I saw it. She's a pretty girl, too, and clever, and if she wasn't Warton's niece I might like her, and be glad to see him married to her. What's her name? I can't remember it. What's her name, again?"

He raised himself in the bed, and looked with eyes of impatient inquiry at Mrs. Alwyn. He did not recognise her in the least, but seeing somebody there, he put his question, "What's her name, I'm asking?"

"Grace," replied Mrs. Alwyn softly.

"Grace what?"

"Grace Ethelstone."

"Yes, to be sure; how did I manage to forget it? — I'll forget my own name next! My head's queer. Grace Ethelstone — a pretty name, too. He's mad about her, Mr. Lennon is. He's wild in love with her, Mary; and she must have thrown him over, or they must have had a quarrel, and that's upset him. Don't you remember, darling, that quarrel we had once — long ago — when I thought you wouldn't marry me, and I got drinking, and then I got into a fight, and all that? You're very well now, Mary, quite well now.

You were very sick a little while ago, but the fresh air will set you all to rights again. I'll get a job of work down the country, and we'll be in the green fields for a bit, girl."

Then the talk began to grow more and more voluble, less and less coherent, until at length it lost itself in mere babblement, and finally was hushed altogether. But Myra had heard enough to convince her that there was more than a gleam of meaning in the poor fellow's words. She felt a deep pang of shame and grief to think that any eyes and heart but her own should have possessed themselves of the purpose of Warton's attentions to her. She thought with dread of the hired nurse coming to hear such talk; and if she could possibly have ventured on such a course, she would have insisted upon remaining at Berry's bedside herself, and alone, until he recovered. But even the sensation called up within her by the allusions to herself and to Warton did not diminish the surprise and emotion with which she heard that Ralph Lennon loved Grace Ethelstone. And she believed it; and she was glad of it. To say that she heard it without one pang of personal pain would be idle. Virtue, alas, cannot so inoculate our age but we shall have our touches of heart-disease, and our morbid shootings of shameful pain. But this first wrongful natural pang over, her healthy womanly sense returned, and she was glad that Lennon loved, and refused to believe that his love could fail to prosper.

Is it incredible that a watch of some few hours should have purified a woman's heart of the one slight taint that was in it, and left her with an affection which was all clear and true and friendly, and could bear the light of Heaven? Is it incredible? Yet in this case it is true. All that was disinterested, loyal, and magnanimous in Myra's nature rose up within her when she heard that Lennon too loved, and the supremacy of her better self was vindicated. With her head buried in her hands, she found relief during the struggle in profuse and passionate womanly tears — tears which, perhaps, even Virtue need not have been much ashamed of; and she felt herself restored to life again. The crisis of *her* fever had come and gone while poor Tom raved and tossed on the bed over which she watched.

Lennon returned after a long delay with the doctor and a nurse. Mrs. Alwyn must return home. She had not had time even to change her habit — and think, ladies, what it is to do the duties of sick-nurse with ever so many yards of cloth skirt gathered up over your arm! Her groom had to be sent on another errand back to the dispensary, which was now kept open all night; and Myra would not wait for his return, but declared she would rather impose on Mr. Lennon the trouble of escorting her home, or ride home alone, than stay any longer. "My husband has not yet returned," she said, "and I should be very glad to get home before him, and save him from such an alarm as the note

I told you of, Mr. Lennon, would have caused him. Come with me."

Lennon was surely not unwilling. Perhaps if the doctor had spoken unfavourably of Tom Berry he might have felt an inward struggle against a proposal to leave his friend even for an hour. But the physician was very hopeful, and there was really nothing to be done for Tom but to leave him in the care of the nurse.

It was past midnight when Myra and Lennon rode by the lake. The night was bright, and they rode fast.

"My mind is much relieved, Mrs. Alwyn," said our friend.

"And mine," she answered, with half a sigh.

"I think poor Tom will recover; and if he does I am sure he and I owe his life to you. How kind and thoughtful and brave you are! I never —" and he stopped awkwardly.

"You never thought I had anything in me worth knowing?"

"O, pardon me, no. I was not going to say that."

"No matter. I don't care to have it amended. We mistook each other, Mr. Lennon; let us own it frankly. I took you for an infidel, did I not? Did you not give yourself out for one? And now I know you for a Christian. Ah, if we had many such! You took me for a mere, formal, good-for-nothing —"

"O pray, Mrs. Alwyn, spare me — don't be cruel. Do spare me."

"At least you did not understand me; and I did not understand you. Let us know each other better henceforward. Let us be friends, Mr. Lennon."

She turned her face and looked fully, frankly on him. The moon-rays fell upon her white forehead, her thick dark hair gathered up under her hat, her full deep eyes swimming in tears.

"Let us be friends, Mr. Lennon;" and she held out to him one gloved hand.

He stooped from his saddle, took the hand in his, and pressed it reverently to his lips.

"To me," he said, "you shall ever be the first and best of friends."

Did any gleam of the thoughts that filled her soul shine upon him out of the struggle of expression that her feelings wrote upon her trembling lips and in her eyes? Did he then for the first time catch a glimpse of her meaning and her heart? Perhaps so, for a strange, almost startled expression flashed across his face. But whatever thought may have arisen within him, he beat it resolutely down, and only took her hand and calmly touched it with his lips, and said the few quiet words we have written.

CHAPTER XI.

Warton makes a Discovery, and does not profit.

A FEW weeks went by, and the aspect of things was as much changed in the region of the lake as the face of the sea on a soft sunny morning after a night of storm. The fever had done its worst, and was gone. The flood was beginning to be a memory. The model village was a sort of convalescent hospital. The grass was growing thick and green already on the frequent new-made graves, among which we are glad to say none had been opened for Tom Berry. Thanks to assiduous care and kindness and skill, Tom had recovered, and was now beginning to walk about again quite sturdily. The fever had passed over the heads of Lennon and Dr. Alwyn and his wife, and laid no hand on them. Soon the old appearance would return to everything, and only those who had to mourn for the dead would think much of what had been.

Lennon had resolved on abandoning wholly his futile philanthropic scheme. Determined to leave Waterdale altogether, he begged to be allowed to bequeath the Phalanstery to Myra Alwyn, to administer it in whatever way she thought best.

"I make you my executor," he said. "You can

turn it to some account — I cannot. And Tom Berry will remain to be your steward.”

“Beg pardon,” interposed Tom, “but there was a distinct understanding that I was to go abroad too. I’m going to Australia, where a man can have the rights of a man. I’d do a deal for this good lady, but she wouldn’t ask me to stay here when I’ve my last chance of going where there’s something like freedom.” So Tom put his resolution not to leave Lennon.

“But I don’t know yet that I am returning to Australia,” said Lennon. “I have thought rather of the United States.”

“The one thing I always longed for,” calmly replied Tom, “is to live under the star-spangled banner. I like it now more than ever, seeing that it doesn’t wave over any slaves. Mr. Lennon, I’m there.”

“If Mr. Berry will not remain to help me,” said Myra, “I must only do my best with Dr. Alwyn’s assistance. But, in any case, Mr. Lennon, I accept with pleasure the office of your viceroy here — if my husband will allow me.”

“Ay, marry,” Dr. Alwyn struck in. “As if he did not know his place and his authority too well to attempt any refusal! I am only a constitutional sovereign, Lennon — I am allowed to reign on condition that I don’t presume to attempt to govern.”

"It is certain that you will go?" said Myra; "that you leave England?"

"Quite certain."

"And alone?"

"No, not alone, it seems; for my friend Tom here insists on accompanying me."

"Well, you do right, Lennon," said Dr. Alwyn.

"To remain here would be only to stagnate — for you, I mean. You have no place here. We can convert your failure into a success. We know our Pappenheimers down here — and you don't, although you are native and to the manner born. They will only move here to the old music, Lennon. Thank Heaven that we can move them at all! Your new philosophy won't grow here; and let me speak frankly out and say I am glad of it, although I believe you are as good a Christian as the Dean of St. Paul's. Go and do something, Lennon. Find a stage somewhere, and play on it; and let us far off here read your name sometimes in the playbill; and send us a friendly line now and then, and perhaps come and see us once or twice in a lifetime. Become famous if you can; but, famous or obscure, you will always be the same to your friends here."

Had Dr. Alwyn looked at his wife while he spoke thus he would have seen tears in her eyes. But neither he nor she would have been ashamed. One of the things that gave him greatest pleasure of late was to

see that his wife had quite got over what he thought her dislike — her unreasonable dislike — of Lennon. He set down the change entirely to the opportunities Myra had lately had of observing the generous and disinterested qualities which Lennon possessed. The good clergyman was delighted to see his wife and his friend at last on terms of cordial and avowed friendship. The conversation just reported was one of many which happened to take place about this time.

Myra was much perplexed about Lennon's intended departure, and his apparent severance from Grace Ethelstone. The subject was one she could not venture to approach directly; but when she did once or twice say something to Ralph about Grace, she saw quite enough in his manner to satisfy her that Tom Berry's delirium spoke the truth. But she hoped soon to have an opportunity of seeing Grace herself, and she thought she might, in friendly confidence, learn something from her.

For the little party was about to break up for a while. Myra Alwyn had been peremptorily ordered by her physician to seek change of air and rest at some warm sea-side place after her late exertions and fatigue, and it was arranged that she should spend a few weeks at Folkestone.

Dr. Alwyn had some business matters to look after in Scotland, in connection with the affairs of a deceased

relative to whom he was appointed executor, and that done he was to join his wife in the south. Lennon was going for a few days to London, to consult his lawyers, and make some arrangement about the disposal of what property he had still left, previous to his leaving England. He longed to be away. Only the urgent pressure of his friends induced him to consent that they should all meet once more on the old ground before he finally quitted England.

So they scattered and went their ways; and Lennon was once more in the Eleanor's Cross in London. Seated at the old table in the coffee-room, where he sat that first morning when Walter Warton found him, he was vaguely thinking over the disappointments that had fallen on him since that day. The coffee-room was given up to himself and the waiters who flickered incessantly in and out. Other people had business or pleasure to follow, and had deserted the hotel immediately after breakfast. Lennon had only a late appointment to keep that day, and did not well know what to do with himself until the time arrived. He had read all the morning papers—at least he had read as much of them as he could by any stress of vacuity be induced to read—and had even glanced over some of the journals of the previous evening. He was standing up to go into the smoking-room, there to puff an hour away, when he heard his own name mentioned by somebody who was speaking to one of the waiters

at the door; and in a moment Walter Warton entered, and held out his hand.

"I met a man last night," said Warton, "who told me you were in town, and I took the chance of finding you here at your old quarters. I have long been anxious to see you."

"Have you been ill?" Lennon asked involuntarily; for Warton was looking very pale and haggard, and his hand was tremulous and hot. His dress was less careful and elegant than it used to be; the words "breaking up" seemed written on every line of his face — in his sunken, glittering, restless eyes, in his forced and wan smile, in his coat, his necktie, his gloves, his hat, in everything about him.

"No, not ill, Lennon; not illness of any bodily kind; but I have been troubled and tried in many ways. I have been disappointed, Lennon — cruelly disappointed! You cannot know what such disappointment as mine is. No matter; we can't talk here — you were going into the smoking-room, I think? Let me go with you."

They went into the smoking-room. Cigars were brought; and Warton ordered brandy and soda-water, of which he drank a mighty draught, and then rang the bell and ordered some more.

"I make myself free of your quarters, Lennon," he said with a ghastly smile.

Lennon only nodded. He was much distressed at

Warton's appearance — and of all men else he would gladly have avoided Warton at the time.

"Listen, Lennon, old friend," Warton began, striking the table heavily with his hand. "You know what going to the devil is? You went half-way along the road yourself at one time; but you stopped at the turning of the paths, and came back; and you were only a boy then. Well, I am not a boy now; and I am going to the devil; and I shall never turn back."

"Come, come," said Lennon, "you must not talk in this grim sort of way; things are not so bad as all that."

"You don't know —"

"Well, I have heard something — just a vague hint, perhaps — that you were a little embarrassed in money affairs — debts, and all that. But everyone has to pass through something of that sort; and you have plenty of time and talent to retrieve yourself."

"No; it's not the debts alone. The worst of these are paid off or staved off. Eastham managed that for me somehow. I have always found Eastham a manly, kindly fellow; though how he managed to raise the money I don't know, for he is sadly dipped himself just now. No, it's not the debts, Lennon. I am played out! My career is done. The infernal Tories have thrown me over — flung me away like an old glove! I met Disraeli the other day, close, face to face, and he cut me dead. He looked me full in the

face, and passed on. By Heavens, Lennon, that man was my political idol! Eastham has done all he can for me; but the word has gone round. They have deliberately thrown me over — for ever. I am almost ashamed to say it, but Eastham begged hard for a place of any kind for me — a colonial judgeship, a consulship, anything at all — and he was flatly refused. And to think what I have sacrificed for these men!"

Lennon writhed under these confidences; for while he pitied Warton, he felt more and more his transparent worthlessness. He could only see in him one who tried to be a valuable traitor and failed, and then bemoaned himself that he had received no reward for his futile perfidy.

"What a happy fellow you are," went on the confiding Warton, "to have nothing to do with politics! Serve a party, Lennon, and you'll find yourself as badly treated in the end as if you were engaged in selling your soul for a heartless woman. Ah, Heaven! But this will only tire you out — you don't take any interest in all this sort of thing?"

"I don't want interest in the matter," said Lennon rather coldly; "but I always thought, Warton, that you were playing a foolish game, and I must say a wrong game. I gave you my opinion on that point long ago — when you asked me, and not before. Of all the Job's-comforter class, I myself least like the people who are always in a hurry to say 'I told you

so,' when a friend has gone wrong; but I always thought, Warton, you were out of your element when you threw away the principles that made you strong; and I must say frankly I think you had no business among the swells. Confound it, Warton, what have you and I to do with earls and cabinet ministers?"

"I don't quite see that a man's being born of humble parents need prevent him from rising in the world, and asserting his place as a man."

"No; and neither do I. But I don't call it asserting my place as a man to pay tribute to rank by hunting after it. Rest upon yourself, Warton, — your own intellect and your own ability, — and you will bring yourself all right yet."

"I cannot; I have heard just such advice before, Lennon, more than once. I have heard it many a time from Grace Ethelstone. *Ex oribus parvulorum*, old fellow; out of the mouths of babes and sucklings are we solemn seniors sometimes admonished. But it's too late. My game is over. My health is gone too. That confounded fainting-trick which so ruined me at that meeting in Northinglen — a scene and a collapse I have never thought of since without humiliation — *that* trick has grown upon me; and I find my eyes grow dim sometimes, and black spots dance before them —"

"You are over-worked and over-excited. Go home, Warton, and remain quietly there for a few weeks with

Mabel and the children. You will soon get strong again; and then turn to your own profession manfully. You will find friends who will help you on. If I were your physician I would prescribe three months of quiet, unbroken, happy home life."

"Home life, Lennon, looks charming to you, I dare say, who do not know what it is. To me it has lost its savour — long ago. I am not happy at home — there, don't look virtuously horrified; I am not going to make you any terrible confidences; but it does relieve my mind a little, even to be able to hint at the truth to anybody. Do you know, Lennon, I have often thought lately that there is a good deal more meaning than we imagine in what these Ritualist fellows are doing with their oral confession? I wish I could talk to anybody — even a Ritualist priest — exactly all that I feel; I think it would relieve me."

"Well, I am not a Ritualist, nor a priest," said Lennon; "but I tell you frankly, I think an evening of digging in your garden with your children would do you infinitely more good than any sickly disburdenings of your soul. A plain, frank question, Warton — can I serve you in any way? If I can I will, for the sake of old times, and Mabel and the children."

"No, Lennon, you can't. No, by Jove, and you sha'n't! I am not going to draw on your good-nature, especially when I can see only too plainly that our old friendship is stone dead, so far as you are concerned

— don't say a word, man; I see it all, and I neither blame you nor wonder. I have no claim on you, Lennon, except that you have a memory of old times, and a gleam of kindly feeling for poor Mabel. I did hope for a long time that you might have thought of my niece, Grace Ethelstone. I did indeed; and believe me, Lennon, if you had loved her and married her, you would never have regretted it!"

"Miss Ethelstone," said Lennon, "has not a friend on earth who thinks more highly of her than I do. But we who are not young, Warton, we can't expect girls like her to think of us as anything but patriarchs." Lennon's effort to say these words in cheerful and careless tone was a grim sight to see. But he remembered his promise to Grace — the promise that he would save her from remonstrances and complaints at home.

"Ah, but you are wrong, Lennon; Grace is not like other girls. You do not know what she thought of you. Mabel knows it, and I know it. It's a shame for me to betray her secret; but she loved you."

"It is not true," said Lennon, losing all self-control. "You are mistaken. Warton, you are deceived. She never cared one rush about me; or if she did, some traitor and liar set her heart against me; and by Heaven, Warton — I must speak out — I more than once suspected that you were that traitor and liar!"

Warton was utterly bewildered by this outburst of emotion. It came so unexpectedly, it seemed so un-

characteristic, that it was Warton's first and natural impulse to believe it a simulated passion. He had not time to collect what he ought to say, when a waiter came in and handed across the table a telegram for Mr. Lennon.

Lennon took it, opened it almost without looking at it, read the name, then fixed his attention steadfastly on it, and read it over two or three times. He let it fall on the table, and remained for a moment silent, hesitating, and thoughtful.

Warton's keen eyes could scan every line of the message, and he read it; for the first fugitive glance he threw upon it showed a name which made his eyes light up and his heart palpitate fiercely.

The message was dated from Folkestone, and was sent to "Ralph Lennon, Eleanor's Cross Hotel, London," from "Myra Alwyn, Shingle Cottage, Folkestone." And it contained these words: "Come to me at once. Leave everything and come here. I shall expect you to-night."

And Warton, who of late always followed the movements of the Alwyns as well as he could, knew perfectly well that Dr. Alwyn had gone to Scotland.

He grasped the edge of the table fiercely to keep down his passion. The room seemed for a moment or two to float round and round him; strange heavy sounds sang dully in his ears, and the air seemed filled with innumerable black specks and bright balls dancing

tormentingly round him. For there smote upon him the hideous conviction that he had been deceived, that the love he had so audaciously thrust upon *her* had been rejected with contempt, not because it was sinful, but because it was forestalled. This, then, was the reason for Lennon's conduct with regard to Grace Ethelstone! Warton identified her wrongs in a moment with his own. He had been mocked and flouted all through. The high-minded and virtuous Mentor who had just been preaching to him had then not only jilted his niece, but superseded him in the love of another man's wife! He could not doubt it. The proofs were damning; but even in that wild and whirling moment of confusion and amazement he resolved that he would have greater proofs yet.

Had Ralph Lennon not been quite wrapped up in his own conjectures and perplexity, he must have been struck by the expression of Warton's face; but he was wholly absorbed in the unexplained message he had received, and bewildered by its genial peremptoriness. He had come to understand Myra Alwyn far too well not to know that there must be some clear and cogent reason to explain the summons; but he was utterly unable to conjecture what her motive must be. So he saw nothing of the conflict of emotion that raged over Warton's pale and haggard face.

"I must leave town, I fear, for a short time," he said to Warton. "I have just received a telegram

which calls me away rather peremptorily. Will you excuse me for a moment, Warton? I want to see about a train and to write a line."

Warton only nodded. When Ralph came back into the smoking-room, two minutes after, there was nobody there. Warton had gone, and had left no message of any kind. Lennon had thought his manner all the day so strange, that he was hardly surprised at this fresh exhibition of eccentricity. He pitied Warton, and was sorry for him; but the distrust and dislike he had begun lately to feel towards him Lennon could not conquer. He breathed more freely now that his old acquaintance was gone.

And yet, as he sat in the train which was rushing to Folkestone, and drew himself up in the seat near the window, rejoicing, as was his wont, to find himself alone, he thought with some remorse over his cold and harsh demeanour towards Warton. The haggard face, the tremulous hands, the restless eyes, haunted him. There was something sinister, ominous, and unnatural about Warton's whole appearance. Lennon's north-country birth and childhood brought him under the shadow of the old superstitions, which are as inseparable from the mountains as the mists that surround them. He was familiar with the deep expressive phrases which had floated down from Scotland along with the weird fancies they embodied; and he knew what it was to be "fey" — to walk, as it were, under the visible

shadow of death; to look and speak and act as a man who felt himself devoted and doomed — consecrated in the old classic meaning of the word. And he thought as he sat in the train — and he thought of it many and many a time after — that Walter Warton was “fey” that day. He deeply regretted now that he had not entered more warmly into the poor fellow’s confidences; listened to the story of his difficulties; been less eager to find fault and blame; shown himself more frank and urgent in his offers of assistance; given at least a genial sympathy instead of a cold and lifeless attention. For the sake of Mabel, his old love — whom once, strange as it now appeared, he did indeed love, O so deeply and so absurdly! — he might have done that much. For the sake of her whom now he loved with so different and so profound a passion, he might have turned less coldly towards one whose misfortune must at least increase her unhappiness. “Have I only played the Pharisee’s part,” thought Lennon, “after all? Have I set myself up for independence of conventionality and scorn of the world’s shabby morals only to turn against this poor fellow in his failure, whom I did not repudiate when he seemed to be successful?” And then he consoled himself with the old words: “Next time! Only wait until the next time we meet! The moment I return to London I will seek him out, and speak frankly with him, and try to be his friend.”

So filled was he with thoughts of Warton that when he got out at the Folkestone terminus, and lingered a moment up and down the platform, in a kind of vague expectation of somebody coming to meet him, he actually fancied he saw Warton cross the line. He really did believe for a moment that the pale worn face and glittering eyes flashed across him and disappeared somewhere. "My eyes are made the fools of my other senses," thought Lennon, scorning at his own fancies as usual. "I have treated poor Warton badly, and my conscience brings a ghost after me. I must make atonement when I get back."

Nobody awaited him on the platform. This was not a tidal train, and there were not many passengers, and there was none of the wild crowding and rushing and dragging of luggage and ringing of steamers' bells and puffing of steam which most of us have come to regard as identical with Folkestone. The platform was empty in a few moments, and Lennon saw that there was nothing to be gained by waiting there. A railway porter directed him to Mrs. Alwyn's address — a cottage by the sea, distant only a few minutes' walk. It was a beautiful autumn evening, and the rays of the sinking sun fell aslant upon the sea; and Lennon could discern faint across the quiet water the earthy cliffs of Boulogne. He did not quicken his pace. Now that he was on the spot, he tantalised himself after his usual fashion, and rather shrank from the disclosure, what-

ever it might be, which was to explain the summons he had received. But there at last lay the cottage, straight before him — a pretty imitation of Elizabethanism, with “Let furnished by the month or for the season” emblazoned in every brick and gable and pane of it; and there, to settle the matter, was Mrs. Alwyn’s own maid, whose face he knew perfectly, standing at the gate. Now then for the mystery! He went up to the gate. O yes, sir, Mrs. Alwyn was in. He was expected. He went in and disappeared.

Disappeared? From whose eyes? From two keen, dark eyes, fierce with the fire of jealousy and hatred, which had followed him.

When Lennon left Warton alone, the latter could no longer restrain his feelings. He would not wait to meet Lennon. The latter only remained away while he was finding out the time of the next train’s departure for Folkestone. But Warton rushed into the street. The glare and noise of the Strand at that glowing hour of the bright autumnal day a little recalled him to composure, and at least external self-control. He made up his mind in a moment. He would watch Lennon and follow him — convict him and expose him. And *her* — yes, expose her! He would ruin and destroy them all. He would brand her in the very eyes of her husband. She should have cause to curse the day when she flung him from her and threatened him. Ah, God! did he not suspect her even then? How could he

ever forget the change which came over her on the road by the lake that day — that hateful day, never to be forgotten — when *he* came in sight? And Lennon! This was his virtue and his honour and his loyalty! The hypocrisy of another seemed dreadful in Warton's eyes; and he could not think any measures unfair or wrong which tended to expose such a man. Warton gnashed his teeth with savage joy at the thought of the destruction he was about to create. "I shall be like Samson," he muttered, with fierce satisfaction, "and pull down the pillars of their respectability and their virtue with me." For he quite included Dr. Alwyn among his enemies, and was hardly less bitter against him for being Myra's husband, than against Myra herself, or Lennon, for being — what he believed they were.

Even fear no longer controlled him. It shot across him now and then with the admonishing glare of a danger-signal, but he heeded it not. He knew Lennon of old, and knowing how generous and patient he was, knew also how stern and fierce he could become; and he thought, "If I expose them all, Lennon is capable of killing me, here in this open street." But he was not to be deterred now, even by fears like that.

He bought a railway-guide, and found that the next train for Folkestone started in an hour. He drove straight to London-Bridge station, had more brandy,

and then went into the second-class waiting-room. Lennon, he felt sure, would be impatient, and therefore early. In fact, Lennon reached the place half an hour before the train started. He had waited only to write a few lines to his solicitor, and to send a telegram to Tom Berry, asking him to come to town at once and see the solicitor, in the event of his, Lennon's, not being able to look after the business in time. Warton peered through a corner of the window, dreading lest any evil chance should send Lennon into that room. At last he saw Ralph get into the train. Warton darted out, took a second-class ticket, jumped in as the train was moving off, and was carried away. In his fear lest Lennon should escape him he leaped rather prematurely out on the Folkestone platform, and had nearly come into collision with his quarry. He darted across the line and, as he felt confident, eluded observation. Then, keeping Lennon always in sight — an easy task, as Ralph did not walk quickly — he followed him at a distance to Mrs. Alwyn's cottage.

And near that cottage he waited for hours. The sun went wholly down, and, the quick darkness of a late summer evening coming on with something of a chilly sensation, the beach was soon cleared of promenaders and nursery-maids and sand-delving children. Warton had a lonely time of it while he lingered and watched, eating his own heart.

When it became quite dark he lay flat on the strand, his feet to the sea, his face turned to the cottage. There he knew he could not be seen by anybody coming out. A long bitter watch he had. It must have been full half-an-hour after he had heard a clock strike eleven that at last — at last — he heard the door open, and presently saw two figures, a male and a female, stand upon the steps. He could not hear a word, nor could he, in the darkness, have identified the figures. They remained a few moments in close conversation; and then at last Warton distinctly saw the man take the woman in his arms and kiss her. And he could see that she clung around him. Then his eyes swam and his heart throbbed; and he next saw the man come down the steps and pass out of the gate alone. The man walked slowly towards the sea — towards where Warton lay prone — and turned back and gazed at the cottage. Then he turned again, and Warton saw his face distinctly. It was, of course, Ralph Lennon. Had Lennon looked down he might easily have seen the croucher on the strand; but Warton took care at once to conceal his face. Lennon did not look down. He glanced vaguely out to sea, turned and regarded the cottage once more, and then strode rapidly away towards the town.

Warton had now no doubt. Indeed it would be too much to say that his mind, since the incident of that day, admitted any doubt; but he came to Folke-

stone to have his conviction made certainty; and now it was certainty. It was as clear to him that the woman he saw was Myra Alwyn as that the man was Ralph Lennon. It has been many times shown that from the first hour he heard that these two were acquainted he had a vague and constantly recurring suspicion. He thought he understood human nature thoroughly, whereas he only understood the nature of one man. He resolved every question in the study of motive and character by unconsciously and instinctively referring to what he himself would have desired or done under similar circumstances. As certain dreamers, brooding over phenomena which are purely subjective, create out of their own morbid mental condition whole systems of spiritualism and demonology and phantomology, and what not, so Warton constantly confounded what he saw in his own heart with observation of human character. A profound egotist, he was unable to conceive of any nature otherwise constituted than his own. He wholly wanted that dramatic and constructive power which might help even a selfish and sceptical man to construct for himself the idea of a disinterested and loyal nature. Thus, when once he had formed a suspicion, his mental presumptions were all in favour of its correctness. There was nothing in him to suggest its improbability. Whether his nearest friend was an utter hypocrite and traitor; whether the woman who seemed purest, and

whom he himself loved best, was really a liar and a wanton — these were with him mere questions of evidence. There was no preliminary revolting improbability about them. The thought of Lennon's perfidy and hypocrisy, of Myra's wickedness, maddened him, because it told of wrong done to him; but he saw nothing in either the man or the woman, in any man or any woman, to make him recoil with disgust from the thought as something too monstrous to be entertained. And it is consoling to feel assured that, dreadfully wicked and weak and deceitful as we all are, men and women — for so our satirists and cynics tell us — the keen observer who explains everything beforehand by reference to some sinister impulse is sure to be out in his reckoning at least a dozen times as often as the simpler being whose first impression is to assume that men and women wish to do well. Many things in life were against Walter Warton. Selfishness, sensuousness, want of perseverance, impatience, the constant desire to reap without sowing, the continual impulse to pluck up the flowers in order to see how they were growing — these characteristics were terribly against him. But perhaps his most fatal snare in life was his incapacity to believe in, or even to realise, the idea of human truth and goodness.

So he tortured himself, and cursed at fate and Heaven and his friends, or enemies — they were now all the same — and even his home and his children

and the memories of his youth, as he crouched that stern night on the Folkestone strand: while Ralph Lennon stood for a moment near him — so near that Warton stretching out his right hand might well-nigh have touched Lennon's foot. The heart and the eyes of each man were filled and dimmed by his own absorbing feelings. A halo of hope and joy shone around Lennon. The sky and the sea were sun-illumined for him. He felt as if he "could have taken the great world in his arms and kissed it." He was enchanted with everything, with everyone; earth seemed all filled with love and friendship; he could have clasped with the most fervent good-will the hand of the stricken wretch who grovelled near his feet, and who hated him and cursed him.

CHAPTER XII.

What he saw.

ALL this time what had become of Grace Ethelstone? A little of her history will explain very easily any seeming mystery about the sight which Warton saw as he glared from the Folkestone strand.

Time had worn itself wearily away during weeks and weeks of Grace's darkened life. After her rejection of Lennon she went back and resumed her small sad routine of monotonous occupation in Warton's household. One only hope and purpose sustained her — the determination to get away from all old scenes, to leave England, and to engage in some artistic toil which should occupy her mental and physical resources together. Added to all the other discomforts of her present life, there was the fact that her round of vapid wearisome domestic duties left her mind free to feed upon its sorrow. So her disappointment and regret preyed upon her like the vampire, and sucked the blood from her veins and the glow from her cheeks. She became pale and thin and nervous. Nay, she even became what the true heroines of romance never do become under any trial or torture — impatient and irritable. The boisterous importunities of the children

were intolerable to her; she actually hid from them when she could, until she grew remorseful for having deserted them, and then sought them out and tried to play with them in the old way, and broke down, and could not bear the pressure upon her nerves and heart any more, and had to escape again. Of course the children soon saw the change, and pitifully complained to their mother that cousin Gracie now did not like to play with them any more.

Mabel, too, must have observed the change even with her own eyes. She hovered round her niece like a large, loving, and agitated bird. She did not ask questions, but she looked them, which was infinitely more trying. Of all the aggravating and agonising petty torments the sad heart knows, one of the very worst surely is the consciousness that its struggles are anxiously watched by somebody who does not venture to ask a question or to express sympathy. Whenever Grace looked up she found Mabel's large brown eyes fixed upon her with an expression oddly compounded of curiosity, bewilderment, and pity; and then the eyes, being caught in the fact, looked away with sudden embarrassment, and their owner made the most elaborate and transparent attempt to seem as if wholly occupied in the consideration of some object quite at the other end of the room.

Poor Mabel's heart and mind were so transparent that her mental mechanism resembled that of the little

skeleton clocks whose movements and machinery are naked to every eye. Therefore Grace could always discern perfectly well what Mabel was thinking of, and Mabel's efforts to extract gently and unperceived the root of Grace's sorrow were, for their very simplicity and ingenuousness, a cruel tantalisation.

"Tell me, Gracie dear," she said one day, "what do you think of that Mrs. Alwyn?"

"Think of her?"

"Yes; I mean do you like her?"

"O, yes; how could I help liking her? she is so very kind."

"Do you think she is a very nice sort of woman?"

"She is very pretty, and very friendly, and clever, and does a great deal of good, I believe."

"Is she what you would call a very good kind of woman? — the kind of woman one would like to be?"

Grace smiled a rather wan smile.

"I think so; I am sure she is very good, and I suppose we should all like to be pretty and good, Mabel — shouldn't we? I should feel very proud, I know, if when I looked in my glass it gave me back such a face as Mrs. Alwyn's."

"Yes; but I don't mean that, and I am sure you have no reason to envy anybody on that score. But what I mean is, I believe gentlemen admire Mrs. Alwyn a great deal; and I was curious to know whether

she seemed the kind of lady who would encourage that sort of thing. I am sure I should hope not; but I thought perhaps you might have noticed."

"Indeed I don't know anything about it, Mabel; I never thought of observing. Mrs. Alwyn seemed to me to be kind and friendly to everyone, and to be very much attached to her husband. In fact, she appeared to me to act very much like any other married woman; at least I didn't observe any particular difference."

"Then you liked her, Grace?"

"Very much indeed. I am not very fond of women in general, but I liked her much."

"And do you like her still?"

"Why should I not, Mabel?"

"Then you don't believe all that about her and Ralph Lennon?"

At last the question had come direct which Grace had been expecting for moments, and vainly trying to fence off.

"O Mabel, how can you ask me such questions? What good is there in talking of such things? I don't believe a word or a hint against Mrs. Alwyn. I believe she is one of the best of women. How can she help it if — if men like her and admire her? I am sure I should admire her if I were a man."

"Yes; but a married woman, Grace!"

"Can a married woman help being pretty and clever and bright?"

"Ah, yes, that is all very well; but you know what I mean, Grace; and you know very well that when a woman is married she ought not to think of being attractive in anybody's eyes but her husband's."

"I don't believe Mrs. Alwyn does."

"O!"

A solemn pause followed this ejaculation. The ejaculation itself meant to express wonder and incredulity kept down by discretion and that Christian charity which thinketh no evil.

Grace did know perfectly well what her aunt meant. She knew that Mabel's meaning, put into plain English, was this: "I think I have found out at last what your trouble is, Grace. I think you are fonder of Mr. Lennon than you would acknowledge; and I am afraid he is fascinated by an odious, wicked married woman; and I pity you from my heart; and I should like to talk to you and comfort you, if I might venture on the subject." All this was unspeakable humiliation and pain to Grace; and this, or something like it, happened almost every day. Good lack! it is a trying and tormenting thing to be watched even by sympathetic eyes, when the sympathy is awkward; and mindless kindness is sometimes as much more painful than cunning malignity as a chance wound from an

honest splinter of domestic firewood hurts more than the clean cut of a hostile sword.

Or sometimes the trial would come in a different way. Perhaps Mabel and Grace were sitting alone, when little Watty would storm into the room, holding up a sheet of note-paper heavily ruled with wavy pencil-lines, and blurred with huge round-hand characters, and blotted with frequent daubs of ink.

"Look here, cousin Gracie! I've been writing to Mr. Lennon; and I think the spelling is all right — two b's in 'double,' Gracie, aren't there? — and now I want you to put it into your letter and send to it him — and please may I close up the envelope myself?"

"But, Watty, I am not writing to Mr. Lennon to-day."

"O, aren't you?"

Great disappointment of expression.

"No, dear."

"Well, to-morrow, Gracie. Keep it for me till to-morrow. And please let me see when you are putting it in, and let me close up the envelope — I always like to close up the envelopes — and then I'll go with Jane to put it in the post."

"But, Watty, I am not going to write to Mr. Lennon to-morrow."

"O! And when, Gracie dear? for I want my letter to go away at once."

"Indeed, Watty, I don't quite know."

"Aren't you ever going to write to Mr. Lennon any more?"

"O, really I don't know; I suppose so, dear — I don't know."

"Why, you don't ever write to him now! It's ever so long since you wrote to him. — Mamma, why doesn't Gracie write to Mr. Lennon now?"

"I don't know, dear. Little boys ought not to ask questions — you know that very well."

"Indeed no, mamma — at least Gracie doesn't think so, for she often said I might ask her questions if I liked."

"Yes, Watty," interposed Grace, with an attempt at mirthfulness; "but then I didn't say that I meant to answer every question you asked."

"Well, but do tell me this, Gracie — do tell me this! Tell me when you are going to write to Mr. Lennon, and why you don't write to him now as often as you did."

"I wrote generally for your papa, and he is not at home now."

"Yes; but, Gracie, you know Mr. Lennon said he would be glad if I wrote to him as often as I liked, and you would send the letters with yours."

"Well, Watty," said Grace, with an ill-suppressed sigh, and very weary of the dangerous argument, "I will put your letter into an envelope, and direct it to

Mr. Lennon for you, if you like, and you shall seal it up yourself."

"Thank you, Gracie. That's very kind of you; for I do so want this letter to go. Will you write anything?"

"No, dear."

"Well, then, just do wait one moment, Gracie. I want just to finish this, and I'll bring it in to you."

Watty darted away; and Grace knew that Mabel's eyes were fixed curiously, sorrowfully on her, and she chafed as she heard her aunt heave a heavy sigh.

Back came Watty in a moment or two. "Look, Gracie; I've put another line or two at the bottom. I wonder if he'll be able to read it."

Grace took the letter and read the postscript:
"P.S. Dear Mr. Lennon, this letter is all Mine for I asked cousin gracie to write to you and cousin gracie said no. So it is only my letter and cousin gracie did not do a word of it."

Out of the question that this letter could go! So there had to be much dreary argument with pertinacious little Watty before the matter could be got rid of for that day.

Grace knew that if Mabel had not some strong suspicion of the truth of the whole affair, she would infallibly have asked at once why her niece did not write any letters to Ralph Lennon now. The question

might have been trying, but the marked avoidance of it was worse. And Grace could not bring herself to make a confidante of poor Mabel. That kindly simple nature had no power of attracting confidence to itself; it could give nothing in return but those weak condoling words which it is the natural fault of the strong and spirited to despise and to find only irritating.

Grace's determination to leave England grew and grew, and became a new source of aggravation because of the difficulties which seemed to stand in its way. These were mental and moral difficulties altogether; indeed, were summed up in the question, how to leave Mabel and the children. A selfish person would have thought nothing of them; and even an unselfish person would have been quite entitled to consult her own happiness and her own future, where no direct claim of duty compelled her to stay. But Grace found it hard even to approach the subject with Mabel; and in the darkening fortunes of the little household it seemed like a recreant and cowardly desertion to go away and leave them. If only a breath of prosperity blew upon the house, then indeed Grace would resolutely announce what she meant to do, and go. But only new and bitter blasts of adversity began to rush over it. Days and days went by, and there was no word of Walter Warton. Letters to his chambers in town remained unanswered, Mabel's misery became so intense that it

was pitiable to see; and it made the house unbearable. Since she discovered that her husband's health had lately been weak, and that he had had fainting-fits, she filled her mind with daily and nightly visions of him lying sick and perhaps dying, with no one to look after him. At last she said she would go up to town, to his chambers; a somewhat spirited resolve for her, because Walter had the strongest objection to being looked after by his womankind; and, moreover, a journey to London was quite a fearsome expedition for Mabel to undertake.

Grace offered to go and bring all the news. She had a sort of presentiment that something might have occurred which it would be as well for Mabel not to hear. Even when little Watty offered to accompany her she refused the escort, and preferred to go alone. Walter's own many hints and expressions almost prepared her for what she was to hear; and she thought it would be only prudent to hear it first alone, and turn it over in her mind before she communicated it to Mabel. It was instinctive with everyone who came into close relationship with Mabel Warton to think of her and treat her as a child, to guard her against shocks, to keep her placid and untroubled.

So Grace went to London. She knew the way to Walter's chambers very well, and knew the main tracks of the metropolis tolerably; and she was not wildly nervous at the corners of streets or haunted by rustic

fear of hansom cabs and thieves. It was a great relief to her to get away from home for a few hours — a greater relief still to be doing something which might give help or comfort to somebody. She almost forgot her own trouble sometimes — only sometimes; for many buildings she passed, some of the streets she walked through, certain book-shops and picture-shops and photographers, reminded her very cruelly of Ralph Lennon, and the happy, happy days, the dear delightful holidays, when he brought her to town, and they went to the National Gallery, or South Kensington, or the Water-colour Exhibition, or the French and Belgian Gallery in Pall-mall; and when he *would* take her into book-shops and buy her some new book that everyone talked of; and when life for the first time began to seem vivid and joyous and purple-tinted. There was a confectioner's shop in the Strand which Grace remembered well as she passed it; not that there was any romantic association or artistic aroma hanging about its tarts and its Bath-buns, its decanter of port and its decanter of sherry; but one day, when Watty formed a part of the company, that youth was gratified by being taken into the shop and largely fed on the most destructive pastry; and the memory of the place was now the memory of Lennon, and of love lost and hope crushed to death. So the unromantic shop was made in a moment as sacred and as sad as a mausoleum; and Grace, going in for dear and melancholy old

acquaintance' sake, tried to eat a Bath-bun, and failed as completely as though it had been compounded of dust and ashes; and she hurried out of the shop, and dropped her veil to hide the tears which she felt might hardly be repressed any longer.

She made her way as quickly as she could towards the Temple, and, "like one upon a lonely road who walks in fear and dread," she "turned no more her head," because she knew that the ghosts of happy and dead days were everywhere lying in wait for her. She was just entering the gate of the Temple which opens into Essex-street, when a handsome young man with a fair moustache drew back politely to let her pass. She hardly looked at him, but he recognised her at once, took off his hat, and addressed her by name. Then she saw that it was Captain Eastham.

"You are coming to look for Mr. Warton, Miss Ethelstone, I venture to think?" he said.

"Yes, indeed," she replied, a little surprised at his words, and the anxious kind of expression which accompanied them.

"Then I am very glad I met you; for I can save you the trouble of walking any farther, and of mounting some very dark and crazy stairs. I have just been to Warton's chambers, and he isn't in."

"I am so sorry; but I think, Captain Eastham, I shall have to mount the stairs and wait for him. I suppose he will soon return."

"No, Miss Ethelstone; pray don't waste your time. I don't think he can return until very late."

"But he is in town?"

"O, yes, decidedly. Yes, he is in town; but indeed I don't think there is any chance of your seeing him to-day."

Grace's face wore such an expression of anxiety and alarm, that Eastham could not fail to see it.

"I think I had better be frank with you, Miss Ethelstone," he said, "and trust to your good sense not to make any unwise use of what I tell you. I know Warton is very anxious not to alarm his wife unnecessarily. He is in town, and he is quite well — that you can tell Mrs. Warton; but at present he is in some little difficulty, or I should rather say he *was*, for it is all on the point of arrangement now. If you come to-morrow, or the day after at farthest, it is very likely you would see him here. I can assure you that the difficulty, such as it was, is all over now; and I think you had better not know any more about it. And pray remember that I am one of Warton's most intimate friends, and only use the privilege of friendship in talking to you at all about affairs of this kind."

"I am much obliged to you, Captain Eastham. I appreciate your kindness; but this is very, very degrading." She stopped suddenly, fearing to say too much and to put it too strongly.

"Unfortunately we men are rather too well used

to such things to mind it much. But, believe me, I would not have said a word of this to you, but that I saw from your manner you would either have found it all out, or suspected something much worse."

"O, don't suppose I feel anything but grateful to you, Captain Eastham, for telling me. I could not have gone back to Mabel — to Mrs. Warton — without knowing something — and —" She again became embarrassed.

"Are you returning home at once, Miss Ethelstone?"

"Yes; I have nothing else to wait for in town."

"You go by London Bridge?"

"Yes."

"May I see you to a cab?"

"Thanks."

He walked with her into the Strand, called a cab, and put her into it. Standing at the cab-door, he said:

"Have you heard lately from our friends in Waterdale — from the Alwyns?"

"No, indeed: and I have been slow and remiss about writing to Mrs. Alwyn."

"Ah! they have had heavy times there lately; you have heard of the floods?"

"No, not a word." Of late no newspaper ever entered Mabel's house.

Eastham told her in a few words. "I only came

from the scene the other day," he said: "Mrs. Alwyn behaved like a regular trump — a heroine I mean; and Lennon's houses are turned to good account at last. What a fine fellow Lennon is! I never knew a manlier fellow. Gad, he makes one ashamed of the sort of life one leads."

"Mr. Lennon is a very good man." And he offered me his love, thought Grace, and I rejected it; and she felt very proud, and shamed, and wretched.

"Yes, he's very good; but he has sense and spirit, too, which somehow good people don't generally have. I fear our friends are not over the worst of it yet — only beginning, in fact; for before I left Waterdale fever had broken out in good earnest. I hope our friends will escape; but they are sure to be, each and all, in the thick of the danger. As soon as I can contrive a pair — do you know what a 'pair' is, Miss Ethelstone? — I'm going down again. I'll range myself under Lennon's banner and try to do something; I don't mean to keep out of the fight. So, Miss Ethelstone, if you should hear of our all being dead one of these mornings, you need not be surprised — and it's not worth weeping for. Indeed, I am inclined to think it's not my luck to finish-up half so creditably, and in such a cause; therefore, my display of valour and devotion is cheap. Good-bye."

He closed the door, bowed, and the cab drove off. He had talked purposely in a rattling, reckless kind

of way, in the hope of diverting Grace's attention from her private vexations; and it must be owned that so far as Warton's difficulties were concerned he was perfectly successful.

Think what Grace's feelings were as she journeyed home! Need it be said that she at once pictured Ralph Lennon as the foredoomed victim of fever? Need it be said that the mere thought utterly shattered the whole foundation on which she had rested the resolution that sent him from her? Bitterly, bitterly, did she now reproach herself. Pride, vanity, mean suspicion, now seemed the sole impelling motives of a conduct which once showed as if it were governed only by principle and right feeling. "I might have had the right to be near him even now," she said to herself; and she envied above all human beings Mrs. Alwyn, who could take a share in the work and the danger. "What wonder if he should admire her, and think highly of her?" poor Grace asked of herself; "she is brave, and I know she is good and generous and devoted. She goes into danger, she lives for something, — and I stagnate here, no good for any purpose, for any human creature; and when I had a chance of winning the right to stand by his side I threw it away like a miserable, self-conceited, suspicious fool! Ah, I did not understand him — I am not worthy to understand him; and if he lives through this he will forget me, and if he dies I shall not be near;

I shall hear of it days and days after, perhaps, as one who had no share in his life, no right even to be told of his death!"

For it would be superfluous to say that Grace Ethelstone now regarded the Waterdale calamities exclusively as they were likely to affect Ralph Lennon. Flood and fever were only ordained to come that they might smite him, or that, even if they spared him, they might banish her from his memory. She was a girl full of generous and sympathetic feeling, but just then it must be owned that she thought little of any other sufferers whom the water and the pestilence threatened, but only of Ralph Lennon's danger. When she remembered Mrs. Alwyn it was with envy, and, perhaps, with some secret, far-down, smouldering sense of womanly anger and jealousy towards one who was so blessed as to share the danger that threatened him. Captain Eastham's words of praise when he spoke of Myra Alwyn came back to her memory; and she thought, "*He*, too, will praise her — has praised her — perhaps will contrast her with me, and remember that I misunderstood him, was thankless to him, and deserted him; and he will despise me."

In such condition of mental torture Grace Ethelstone reached the now dismal house which she called her home. She was able to assure her aunt, on Captain Eastham's authority, that Walter Warton was quite well — only greatly occupied; and the story of the

flood and fever in Cumberland served at least to distract Mabel's attention for the moment. In a day or two after came a purposely reassuring letter from Walter.

Every day now Grace took care to get a paper. Of course it told her nothing. A London daily journal concerns itself little about the calamities of a Cumberland village. She did find one day a small paragraph alluding to the floods and the subsequent outbreak of fever, but it gave no hint as to the evil results of either. Days and weeks wore on, during which her misery sometimes seemed greater than she could bear. She grew thin, pale, and even haggard. Her eyes grew brighter, her step became languid. Mabel might have been greatly alarmed by the change in the appearance of her niece; but that Walter had not yet come, and Mrs. Warton was absorbed in her own grievances and her own fears. So there was little sympathy, no companionship, between these two women; and Grace was nearly as desolate as if she lived in a howling wilderness. It is one of the peculiar trials of a woman's life that she can so seldom do anything but wait and bear. Custom, education, the rock of inexorable etiquette to which her sex — Andromeda-like — is bound hand and foot, rob her troubles of even that bracing element of excitement which the difficulties he has to battle against provide for a man. The husband or brother goes out to fight, and falls, at all events, in the heat and passion of active endeavour.

The lot of the woman is to be tied to the stake, like the Scotch girl in the doubtful scrap of Covenanting history, until the rising tide comes slowly, cruelly in, and at last swallows her up.

Grace Ethelstone was a girl of spirit and energy. Mabel Warton was a feeble fond heavy creature; but in this regard they were on an equality. The one could but wait and watch and maunder and fear for her absent husband; the other could only feed her heart on terror for the fate of the lover whom in any case she seemed to have hopelessly lost.

At last, one memorable day, a light streak suddenly flashed in upon the cold and leaden sky of Grace's life. The postman brought her a letter, which she seized with eager joy, even before knowing whence it came. As we have spoken of women's special trials, let us not forget to mention one of their special advantages. They are glad to hear the postman, and they like receiving letters; whereas to a man the prospect of his letters is a bore and an infliction. The reason requires no philosophy to find out. Your wife's letters come from her friends merely, and are all pleasant gossip or interesting family news. Your friends do not write to you to gossip with you, or tell you of what is going on: people only write to you when they have business with you — as a rule only when they have claims to remind you of or favours to ask. Observe how eagerly a woman snatches at her letters — observe with what

an air of doubt, satiety, discomfort her husband takes up and turns over his allotment, well knowing that, be they never so many, there will be hardly one among them which anybody could find pleasure in reading.

Grace, then, took her letter eagerly. It was in a woman's handwriting, and she knew but one woman who was likely to write to her. It must be from Mrs. Alwyn, though it bore the Folkestone postmark. It was from Mrs. Alwyn, and Grace's excitement when she had turned in the first instance to the end of the letter and read the signature was very keen.

Many a time of late days she had thought of writing to Mrs. Alwyn. Were there no other reason to prompt her, she was absolutely in need of someone to help and guide her in her scheme of leaving England. How to set about going to Italy; how to get there; what to do when she got there — were torturing puzzles to a girl who had never in her life made a journey alone, or gone anywhere out of England. She had had vague ideas once or twice of cutting off her hair, getting boy's clothes, and, thus relieved of the social inconveniences of womanhood, taking the first train and steamer for the Continent anywhere, and trusting to Providence for the rest. But this scheme on calm consideration seemed hardly satisfactory; and she often thought of Mrs. Alwyn as the one woman she knew who could help and counsel her. For some days back she had almost forgotten all this in her

anxiety about Lennon's present dangers; and Mrs. Alwyn became in her eyes the one only woman who could tell her anything of him and understand her feelings. Yet again and again she found that she could not bring herself to write to Myra Alwyn. No; there had been that said of *her* which the pride and bitterness of Grace's heart declared must divide them. Grace did not believe a word that was hinted or spoken against Mrs. Alwyn; but if, *if* Lennon admired her, and had her companionship in a time of trial, enough! If he admired her only too much — and what was more likely? — then with what heart could Grace bring herself to appeal to such a friendship? No! She actually began more than one letter to Myra Alwyn, striving to school herself into magnanimity and Christianity and what not; and she only tore them up in anger and despair, and at last boldly asked of herself, "What is the use of this? I am only a woman, with a woman's love, and spite, and jealousy. I cannot be anything else, and I will not pretend to be."

So her heart leaped up with surprise and fear, and something like hope, when she opened the letter and saw Myra Alwyn's name.

This was what she read:

"MY DEAR GRACE, — I have been for a long time thinking of writing to you, and I have been quite as long expecting to hear from you. Unfriendly creature,

why do you not write? Perhaps you will retort upon me; and perhaps there would be a little, only a little, justice in the retort. But we have had a heavy time of it lately, as you must have heard, and our poor little community seemed marked out for calamity after calamity. First we had floods, and then we had fever; and our poor people suffered cruelly from both. So many suffered, and so many perished, that I feel a sort of scruple even about expressing gratitude for our own escape, and *the escape of those we value most, and who were in most danger*. It seems something like selfishness to rejoice that we were unharmed when so many suffered. One should thank God for it in silence; but I tell you, because you will be glad to know.

“One of those who were in great danger was poor Mr. Berry, whom I think you know — Mr. Lennon’s *protégé*, or, as Mr. Lennon himself would say, his friend. And I am glad now to echo the words, for I have learned to understand Mr. Lennon better in every way than I did when you and I last spoke together about him. Mr. Berry was very bad, and, indeed, at one time it seemed as if he could not recover; but Heaven spared him, and he is quite restored now. Mr. Lennon was not attacked by fever at all, although nobody could have taken less care to guard himself; and Dr. Alwyn, too, who was in danger from morning to night, came off quite unharmed.

“But it so happened that I spent a few hours in

helping to nurse poor Berry; and they who watch over fever-patients often hear truths they did not expect, as well as wild delirious ravings. I heard from Mr. Berry's lips, my dear Grace, something about which I want so particularly and so earnestly to speak to you. I am now staying at Folkestone for a few days, as I was ordered imperatively to take change of air. Will you come and pass a day or two with me — as many days as you can? I am very, very lonely here; my husband is in Scotland, and I don't know a creature here, and I don't want to; but I do want you to come and pass a little of the time with me. Indeed, I am selfish in this; but I *must* see you, dear, and there are special reasons why I want to see you soon; therefore, I am sure you will not refuse me, but come as soon as ever you can. — Affectionately yours,

“MYRA ALWYN.”

Grace's heart beat strangely as she read this letter, and, of course, she read it over again and again. Her first impulse, we are sorry to say, was not to go. Her spirit resented deeply the bare idea of the kind of rivalry which had been suggested to her unsuspecting heart as unconsciously existing between Myra Alwyn and herself. But a moment of reflection allowed purer and more generous feelings to arise, and she recognised in Mrs. Alwyn a true-hearted woman, with a noble nature, whom it was well to know, whose friendship it

was a pride to have. And then came with these better thoughts the refreshing consoling hope that at last she had found perhaps some woman's heart to which she might confide the trials and disappointments and struggles of her own. At least, Myra Alwyn could tell her what to do with her life, could help her wavering conscience in deciding whether she ought to leave Mabel or not, and could show her in any case how to make existence better than a vain repining, a prolonged regret. She did not think very much about that part of Myra's letter which related to the words Tom Berry had let fall in his delirious hours. She had heard many times casual and vague allusions to an early political association between Berry and Walter Warton, and she rather fancied that it was something concerning the latter she was to hear, and which, perhaps, she was to be the medium of conveying in some graduated and softened way to Warton's wife. That anything Tom Berry had said could affect her personally, it never occurred to her to suppose. But she assumed that it was somehow a duty to go and hear what Myra had to say; and that thought alone would have decided her.

She told Mabel of the invitation; and Mabel received the news with upturned eyes which expressed amazement and other emotions the owner of the eyes did not care to put into words. The amazement was even increased when Grace declared that she meant to go.

"I am sure, Grace, you are very good," was the sole and significant comment of her aunt — a comment which sent a flush of pain and anger across her niece's face. Marvellous and inexhaustible is the pain-giving power of the good and the dull. "Weak creatures too have stings," says Schiller's hero. Perhaps the keenest of the stings are those which are used by weak creatures who have no idea of stinging at all.

But, her comment over, Mabel was really glad that her niece should have a day or two of change and relief from the moping monotony of the life that had lately been hers. Besides, Mrs. Warton was anxious to hear all the news of what had lately passed at Waterdale, and what had happened to Ralph Lennon, and how about Tom Berry, whom she remembered well as "a devoted follower of Walter, my dear, long ago, before you were grown enough to understand politics. And, indeed, I often meant to ask Walter about him, for I heard nothing of him this long time, only I forgot it all. One has so many tiresome and vexatious things to think about, that really, Grace, I begin to be afraid sometimes that I am growing quite egotistical and selfish."

So Mabel sped the going of her niece. When Grace next day was kissing the children, and about to leave in a specially ordered "fly" for the station, Mabel threw her arms around her neck, and said:

"O, dear Gracie, how I hope something good is going to happen to you!"

Grace smiled very sadly.

"And, Gracie dear, while you are away, do think of me and pray for me — pray that I may see my dear Walter again before you return, and that he may be well, and we may meet you with some good news; for I have had such miserable dreams lately, and I can't imagine why he stays away so long; and I always think that he has fallen sick somewhere, or perhaps is dead." Her eyes were suffused with tears.

"Dear Mabel, I wish I had not thought of going until Walter came back. No — I'll not go. It will be time enough when he comes."

"O, no, Gracie! Don't make me think myself so foolish and selfish. No — don't say another word — good-bye, dear! — Go on!"

These last words were spoken to the driver. With an utterly unwonted effort of energy, Mabel literally dismissed her niece, and cut short all possible remonstrance.

"I think something good is going to happen to her," Mabel said to herself, as she stood upon the little grass plat and watched the departing vehicle. "I don't know why; but I do think something good is going to happen to her; and I wish I didn't feel so miserable about Walter."

It was evening when Grace reached Folkestone,

and was welcomed by her friend. Mrs. Alwyn allowed the hours which still remained between day and darkness to pass away in conversation over all that had happened in the way of pestilence and deluge since they last met; and only when they sat alone in the deepening twilight, and when the two women could scarcely see the hue of each other's faces, did she approach the one purpose which she had most at heart. She came to it, at last, directly — not without a flush on her cheek, and something of a tremulous motion on her lips.

“Grace dear, why don't you marry Mr. Lennon? He loves you.”

And then, before Grace could recover from the surprise of the sudden question, Myra told her all she had heard and guessed, and at last discovered; and spoke of Lennon's manliness and truth and goodness with a fervour which brought tears into her own eyes as well as into those of Grace. And all was spoken so tenderly, and with such a delicate friendliness, that Grace could not refuse her confidence if she would; and at last — at last — Myra learned the one supreme reason which had influenced Grace in her heavy sacrifice. She learned that Lennon had been credited with love for her — for Myra Alwyn — and she learned too, piecemeal, from what lips that story had come. And without betraying excitement or anger, without breathing a word or hint of what she knew of Walter

Warton, Myra calmly and firmly crushed the whole story. Perhaps there was a certain slight, almost imperceptible, bitterness of expression in the tone of her voice when, dismissing that part of the subject for ever, Mrs. Alwyn said:

"My dear, Mr. Lennon never cared for me, or thought of me, any more than he did of any poor woman in the village — or of the Queen of Sheba."

And there the conversation closed. Mrs. Alwyn never said a word about the subject next day; and to Grace it only seemed as if she had learned, too late, that she might have been happy. What was done was done, and there was no recalling it now. She had wronged Ralph Lennon and herself; and Mrs. Alwyn had told her that Lennon was going to leave England, and so all was over.

But that evening came Ralph Lennon, summoned by telegram, to Folkestone. And this was how it happened that, when he arrived and asked for Mrs. Alwyn, he was shown into a room where he found not Myra Alwyn, but Grace Ethelstone.

CHAPTER XIII.

Faithful Unbelief.

DR. ALWYN had got through his business in Scotland pretty quickly, and hurried down southward to spend a few bright days with his wife on the Folkestone shore; but he paused for a little in London. He really had a day or so to spare, and he positively would at last do something about finding a good publisher for the long-contemplated Flora. After all, he began to think, it is very hard to work steadily at a book until you have arranged for its publication. Once fix a time, understand that the printer must have it precisely at the appointed day, find the proofs of the earlier chapters come pouring in upon you, and the printer sending messages for more of the Ms.; and then a man is put on his mettle, he really goes to work with a will, and he gets the thing positively done at last. Therefore Alwyn resolved that he really would not leave London until he had made positive engagements, and put himself actually into harness. He meant to indulge himself in a little luxury too; the book should be handsomely printed, and it should be rich in illustrations, most of which were to be the work

of Myra; and one or two, of perhaps a rather more pretentious style, he had compelled Grace Ethelstone to promise that she would do. This was to be his one work; and as he knew there was not a ghost of a chance of its paying — in fact, he made up his mind that all the copies would have to be given away — he resolved that he would treat his friends and the scientific reviewers handsomely, and give them something fair to look at, as well as, he hoped, tolerable to read. And if — well, he was not sanguine or over expectant, but if it should after all turn out a success, and be acknowledged as such by competent critics, and received into literature, and reproduced in popular-science editions, and give to the name of Alwyn a mild scientific lustre — why that, of course, would be a splendid result, and he had not lived in vain. If not, then he had merely done his best and failed, like better men; and Myra and his friends would have the book to read in handsome print — and the flowers would bloom along the edges of the lake all the same.

In any case he would arrange at once for the publication of the book, and so bind himself to its prompt completion. From his hotel in Jermyn-street he despatched a telegram to his wife, to tell her of his arrival in town, but that for very, very particular reasons, of which more hereafter, he did not think he could leave London that night — perhaps not until the following evening. For he looked upon the finding of a pub-

lisher — although he was about to publish at his own risk — as a difficult, racking, and slow business; and, indeed, was nearly as nervous about presenting himself with his order for printing, engraving, advertising, and publishing, as a maiden from the country with her first novel.

He walked down the Haymarket and Pall-mall to the Strand; then he suddenly bethought him of Ralph Lennon, who he had no doubt was in town, and it seemed a happy idea to take Ralph into council, and go with him to the publisher. For Ralph knew something of science, and had, as he learned, in earlier days written for reviews and mixed with literary men — and, more than that, had once published a volume of fierce youthful poems, the general object of which was to find fault with the arrangement of Providence, and to let off the crackers of youthful scepticism in the face of Heaven. Lennon had at the time been a passionate student of "Queen Mab," and some of his college friends assured him his verses were quite as fine as Shelley's. But even their Promethean iconoclasm and indignation failed somehow to arouse the admiration or the pious wrath of critics; and a little volume of Sunday school-hymns could not have received less attention at the hands of the reviewers. But the fact that Lennon had published anyhow any sort of book naturally made him an authority on publishing, and a valuable guide to one ambitious in that way; and so

Dr. Alwyn resolved to find him out, and take him into council. He knew Lennon's hotel, and he turned in there and inquired for his friend. This was the day but one after Lennon had left town.

No; Mr. Lennon was not there; had not been there since the day before yesterday; but was undoubtedly returning, for nearly all his luggage was there. A gentleman had been asking for him two or three times yesterday, and a person had just been to look for him, and left a message to say Tom Berry was in town, and would come in the evening. "O, here is the gentleman again, sir."

"Not come back?" said Walter Warton in a strident voice, and looking at nobody. He had kept calling, not that he wanted to see Ralph Lennon, but that he wanted to be sure that he was still absent, to have heavier and heavier proofs against him.

"Why, Warton, is it you?" said Dr. Alwyn, advancing. "Glad to see you! On the same errand as myself, looking for our long-lost friend?"

"Dr. Alwyn! Where have you come from?"

"From Fife, my liege; at least, from Scotland."

"And when?"

"Last night, or rather this morning."

"You have not been to Folkestone?"

"No, not yet; and I fear I can't get there to-day, and I am sorry for it, because my wife will be lonely."

A savage smile crossed Warton's livid face. They had now reached the street, and Dr. Alwyn saw with amazement how haggard and wild his companion looked. He seemed like a man who had not slept or even undressed the previous night. His eyes were bloodshot, his beard was unshaven, his hands were dirty — yes, actually dirty.

"I am glad I met you," exclaimed Warton. "I want to speak to you. I *must* speak to you. Not here: five minutes alone — anywhere — but we must be alone."

"Certainly, anywhere you like; but what is the matter with you? Are you ill, Warton, or have you any bad news to tell? Has any misfortune happened to you? Are your family all well?"

"O yes, yes; all quite well. Everybody quite well, except you, Dr. Alwyn, and me. I can't talk to you here. Will you give me five minutes' conversation or not?"

"Certainly; I have said so. But I hate mysteries and surprises, Warton; and I must know one thing at once. Have you any bad news for me? Is my wife well?"

"Well, O yes! Mrs. Alwyn is quite well. When I saw her last, only the day before yesterday, she was quite well, and happy."

"Then I have no more fears or conjectures, and I

don't even ask whether what you want to say relates to yourself or to me. Where shall we go?"

"To my chambers, in the Temple?"

"My hotel is nearer — Jermyn-street."

"Then come there."

Warton hailed a hansom, and they got in and drove to the hotel. Neither spoke a word on the way. Dr. Alwyn had heard something lately of Warton's difficulties, and felt no doubt that the purpose of their mysterious conference had some reference to his companion's own affairs.

They got out, and Alwyn led the way to his small sitting-room, handed a chair to his friend, and then said cheerily, "Now then, Warton, for your portentous communication. Business first, if it is to be business, and we can talk of other things afterwards."

Warton sat down and thrust his hands into his pockets, and stared at the carpet. Then he glanced at the table, and made a motion with one hand, as if to stretch for something which ought to be there, — he needed a little stimulant to his courage now that the time had come, — and shrugged his shoulders despondingly. At last he drew a long breath, and seemed to have screwed himself up to the task he had undertaken.

"Dr. Alwyn, I have something painful to tell you; but you will not blame me. Perhaps at first you will not believe me. I do not ask you to hear me patiently

— no man could hear very patiently what I have to say; but I do ask you to hear me.”

“Out with it, man! The prologue is, I feel no doubt, a good deal worse than the performance. Out with it at once, Warton — don’t be eloquent.”

“Did you expect to find Ralph Lennon here in London?”

“Yes; I did. What then? Has anything happened to him?”

“You don’t know where he is now?”

“Surely not; but your manner makes me anxious to know.”

“You shall know. Mrs. Alwyn is in Folkestone?”

“Yes. What of that?”

“Is she alone?”

“She is. What has this to do with the matter?”

Dr. Alwyn did not like this sort of cross-questioning. There was something sinister in it. His usually clear brow darkened, and his lips contracted.

“She is not alone, Alwyn! I tell you you are deceived. Ralph Lennon is with her, and has been these two days.”

“It’s a lie!” exclaimed Dr. Alwyn, springing fiercely up, and looking for the time once more like the Alwyn of five-and-twenty years ago who pulled stroke-oar at Oxford, and was not unskilled to stand up to the sturdy and muscular bargee. “It’s a lie — a — a — downright lie!” (O, what a narrow escape

that from the use of a stronger expression!) "And what do you mean — and how dare you, sir, come and make your insolent insinuations about my wife?"

Warton had not up to this moment felt quite assured that Dr. Alwyn — clergyman though he was — might not knock him down at the first brunt of the revelation. He had a nervous dread and horror of physical violence. Therefore he felt much relieved now that the worst danger was over. He thought he could manage the rest easily.

"I said I did not expect you to be patient. How could I? You are angry with me; but you will soon transfer your anger to its proper object. Alwyn, I use no insinuations. I tell you what I know, and no more. I tell you that your wife telegraphed to London asking Lennon to come to her. I tell you that he went to her. I tell you that he has been with her since the day before yesterday."

"I don't believe a word of it. It's all a confounded mistake of some kind, and you ought to be ashamed, Warton, to talk such detestable things of a lady — a lady the latchet of whose shoes, sir, you are not worthy to unloose. Go away, Warton, and let us not meet any more — anywhere. I tell you again I don't believe it — not a word! Tell the liar who told you this stuff that he is a fool for his pains; and, stay, don't tell me who he is; I had much better not know."

"But I swear to you it is true! It is as true as

that God is in heaven! I saw the telegram with my own eyes — I saw Lennon go into Mrs. Alwyn's lodgings — and I saw him leave her at midnight."

"*You* saw all this — *you*? How came you to see what happened at Folkestone?"

"Because I suspected Lennon — and — and I watched and followed him."

"O!" A sort of faint light seemed somehow to break upon Dr. Alwyn. "You watched and followed him! You have quarrelled with Lennon?"

"No, Dr. Alwyn," replied Warton with a bitter smile; "your conjecture is a failure, and it is not much of a compliment to me; but let that pass. I have not had one word of quarrel with Lennon. We are good friends."

"It is because of your good friendship then that you come and tell me this — this singular story! It won't do, Warton. I don't know how you have been deceived — I don't know whether you are trying to deceive: I am not sure whether you are madman or scoundrel; but this I do know, your story is not true. I don't believe it."

"This is the very blindness of incredulity. I tell you I saw Lennon with my own eyes — I watched him — I saw him come out — I saw what I don't care to describe to you —"

"No, you had better not!"

"You are deceived; you are made a fool of. I suspected this a long time; now I know it."

"Listen, Mr. Warton; and whatever comes of this conversation it must be the last we ever have. I cannot divine your motive; you may have a good motive, though I cannot believe any man ever yet acted as you seem to have done from a motive wholly good. But I owe it to my wife to pledge my honour even to you that, if you are speaking sincerely in this, you are utterly mistaken. I know Myra Alwyn. Even if all that you say be literally true, there is some honest and just explanation of it. That explanation I at least shall await patiently. I am sorry you came and told me of all this, because it ends our acquaintance — of necessity. I cannot continue any friendship with a man who from whatever motive could speak so of my wife — of my dear, dear true and pure wife. It is the first time, sir, I have ever listened to this sort of thing, and it shall be the last."

"This passes all belief," said Warton, springing up. "I pity you, Alwyn, for being so blind and so deceived. But you are a model husband — that is one thing certain. Go on and believe! I am sorry I told you anything, the advice is so completely thrown away. I accept your renunciation of friendship. I release you from any acquaintanceship or even recognition. I have told you of the base and wicked plot that is being played out at your expense, and your answer is insult.

Believe and believe; your eyes will be opened some day."

"Stay a moment." Warton was about to leave the room. "You must have had some motive in this. I tell you again I don't believe in high-minded men playing the part of detectives; and I am sure there was some secret reason for your doing what you have done. You say you have long suspected this. You say you watched, and followed, and all that. Why did you suspect? Why did you watch? Why did you feel called upon to constitute yourself the critic of my wife's conduct?"

"Do you really want to know?" replied Warton, turning back with wild passion in his eyes. His reception, the utter failure of his attempt, his fury at what he thought Alwyn's wilful blindness, were driving him to despair. "Do you really want to know? Then I'll tell you — there is nothing in it to shake *your* nerves. Because I loved your wife; and I told her so; and she flung me off and scorned me; and I knew it must be for *him*; and I watched him and her, and I found them out!"

For a moment Warton fully expected, as the light of Dr. Alwyn's clear gray eyes flashed on him, that he was about to receive a blow which would dash him to the ground; but he hardly heeded even that just now.

There was, indeed, a fierce momentary struggle in

Alwyn's heart. But the habits of the clergyman prevailed, and the strong clenched right hand was dropped. "That explains all," he said calmly. "You can go now. No words of mine could express the contempt I feel for you. Even if I were not a clergyman, I doubt whether I should not be degraded by inflicting on you the punishment you deserve. But don't delay a moment here; I cannot long answer for my self-control."

He pointed to the door and turned his back. When he looked round again, Warton was gone.

Then Dr. Alwyn sat in his armchair, and buried his face in his hands. Indeed, it is not unlikely that tears were for a while in his eyes. He felt that his wife, his home, their life, and their love had been degraded by the hideous dialogue he had just been forced to carry on. Never, never before did he conceive it possible that a doubt could enter any human mind of the purity of the wife whom he so loved, and of whom he was so proud. He grieved for her, felt shamed for her, that she should be thus suspected, thus calumniated, even by one who had avowed so base a motive. And he felt too a sickening distrust and disgust of the world and its ways. If it was true what that man had said — that he had dared to make love to Myra all the time that he, Myra's husband, trusted him as a friend, regarded him as a Christian, and a man of honour — then what a hideous maze of deceit and wickedness had been spinning around a pure and quiet

home! And Myra! — did she know it — had she kept it secret, from whatever motive, from him? Was not that wrong to do? Is there anything whatever which a true wife may lawfully keep as a secret from her true husband? Ah, no! he sadly thought, there is no such thing. Such concealment is all wrong. And did Myra conceal?

Whatever might be the truth which he had yet to learn, he could believe nothing bad of her. If she had concealed anything from fear or prudence or delicacy, or whatever other motive, it was unwise, it was a mistake, it was a fault. But he could as soon doubt of the truth of the Gospel he daily taught and read, as of the purity and goodness of his wife.

He had with him a book which was far more dear to him than even the cherished Flora; in which he found higher thoughts than in his Shakespeare and Chaucer, and a more consoling influence than the serene stars of midnight diffused. And he opened it to calm his agitated mind; and on the first page whereon his eyes lighted he read some words that seemed as if they spoke to him for his absent wife, and ordered him to have no doubt of her truth and faith:

“For false witnesses are risen up against me; and such as breathe out cruelty.”

“Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.”

"My lovers and my friends stand aloof from me, and my kinsmen stand afar off."

"They also that seek for my life, lay snares for me; and they that seek my hurt, speak mischievous things and imagine deceits all the day long."

It seemed to him almost as if he heard the voice of his wife, sweet, clear, and tender, read out these words to him in answer to any secret half-formed doubt that might have crept into his startled soul. And he felt rebuked, ashamed that even for half a moment the mere breath of such a doubt could have passed over him. He felt no doubt any more. He was satisfied of the truth and faith of the woman he had married, who was not, indeed, he sadly acknowledged, the wife of his youth, as is the Scriptural phrase, but who had, of her own free choice, given her youth to him; and to whose love he at least brought the love of a heart that was always young in its feelings. No, he thought with pride, the man did not live whose word could be evidence against her purity and honour to raise a doubt in the heart of her husband.

He kept the volume open before him, and his eyes and his thoughts rested on its consoling, strengthening passages. So much did it help to calm his mind, that he began to think of Walter Warton as one afflicted by some strange mental delusion, which indeed his disordered wild appearance seemed of itself to indicate; and Alwyn pitied him, and reproached himself as hav-

ing erred in driving away as a slanderer and a culprit one who needed care and watchfulness as the victim of a shaken reason.

He must have remained some time, perhaps an hour, thus silent and thoughtful, sad, indeed, and shaken in nerves, yet secure and serene of soul, when he was disturbed by a knock at the door. He glanced quickly round the room to see that all was orderly — he had a steady-going middle-aged English gentleman's veneration for order under whatever circumstances — and then he called out to the disturber to come in.

The door opened, and Ralph Lennon entered the room, looking unusually bright and vivacious, and holding out his hand.

"I hardly expected to find you in town so soon," said Ralph; "but I came on chance, and I was so glad to hear that I had made a lucky venture. I would not wait to send up my card, but insisted on coming straight up. I have something good to tell you — congratulate me beforehand. But what is the matter? — have you been ill?"

He came to a sudden pause, and looked anxiously at Alwyn's pale face and disturbed expression.

Alwyn had for his part scanned his friend's face a moment with penetrating gaze. He read nothing there but frankness and honesty.

"No, Lennon, not in the least ill; I am glad to

see you. Tell me your good news; but first give me your hand."

Lennon thought his friend must have known the good news already, for the warm pressure which his hand received seemed as if it spoke a silent fervent congratulation.

CHAPTER XIV.

"O, that's sudden!"

WALTER WARTON rushed into the street after his abortive interview with Dr. Alwyn. He had, however, to stop for a few moments, and then to walk very slowly, for the palpitation of his heart came on so fiercely, and came, too, accompanied with such a difficulty of breathing, that he could hardly move. He had some vague idea of going to his chambers, and lying down there upon a sofa, and getting some brandy — and then thinking out the situation calmly, if he could. As yet he was too fierce and bitter against all the world to feel how deeply and how uselessly he had degraded himself. But he had a dim sense of ruin hanging over him; of shame and hatred following him; of friends turned into enemies; of the whole circle of society in a conspiracy to tempt him and deceive him, cause him to betray himself and then cast him off. At the present moment he hated Alwyn perhaps most of all; for he had expected to see Alwyn flung like himself into a passion of wrath and despair, and, lo, Alwyn had looked calmly and trustingly to the image of his absent wife, and refused to believe himself wronged.

Perhaps Warton's only clear thought at present was a resolve to go to work again to find proofs irrefragable, to force Alwyn's eyes open, thrust the truth down his throat, confound all his enemies together, and then — let what would come.

He was just about to hail a passing hansom when someone caught him by the arm. Turning impatiently, almost savagely, round, he saw the handsome genial face of Captain Eastham.

"Why, Warton, I have been looking for you in no end of places! Glad to find you at last. But what's the matter, old fellow? You look dreadfully cut up."

"Nothing, nothing at all, except a headache, or something of that kind. I am glad to see you, Eastham. Which way are you going? I was just about to drive to the Temple?"

He earnestly hoped his friend was going some other way.

"I'm going westward. But don't be in a hurry. I suppose I may now openly congratulate you, may I not?"

"Congratulate *me*? What do you mean, Eastham?"

"Don't look so angry. I didn't suppose it was such a profound secret. The fact is, Warton, I've just come from Folkestone — on my way from Paris — a flying visit there of a day; and I've heard the whole thing, and seen the parties to the conspiracy too —

and, by Jove, I envy one of them. So I know it all, and you needn't make any more mystery about it."

"Eastham, I don't know what the devil you are talking about. If there is anything very funny in all this, I tell you candidly I'm not in a condition to understand humour just now. Pray spare me."

"How serious and wretched you look! I fear, Warton, something is really wrong with you. And you positively tell me you know nothing of all this?"

"All what?"

"About your niece and Lennon — that they are to be married —"

"Lennon and Grace to be married! My God! Eastham, you are mistaken — you are talking nonsense! If you only knew — and, by Heaven, you shall know! Lennon and Grace! No, it can't be; and it sha'n't be!"

"Why not? I always thought Lennon and you were the warmest friends. This I do know, Warton, whatever may have happened since, that Lennon has behaved like a true friend to you. And as for this business of the marriage, I can tell you — and I don't know why you are ignorant of it — that it is as certain as that you and I are talking here. Lennon himself told me; and so did Mrs. Alwyn; and — why, confound it, man, I've seen the bride-elect, and congratulated her; and a charming girl she is! What a sly fellow Lennon is! I never suspected anything of

the kind, or — who knows? — there might have been a rivalry and a duel."

"I beg of you, Eastham, to tell me coolly one thing, for my mind is all distracted. Where did you see Grace Ethelstone?"

"At Folkestone, of course — with Mrs. Alwyn. The fact is, it seems, there had been some misunderstanding, or lovers' quarrel, or something of the kind, and Mrs. Alwyn — who, between ourselves, is a regular trump and a delightful little woman — she set to work to make it all up, and of course she succeeded. Miss Ethelstone has been staying with her for some days, and she got Lennon down there too; and you know the rest; and you see before you, Warton, a blighted being."

"You are sure of all this, Eastham — sure beyond all doubt?"

"Sure beyond the remotest possibility of doubt — unless Mrs. Alwyn and your niece and Lennon and I are all lunatics together. I was longing to see you to congratulate you. For let me tell you, Warton, you are more indebted to Lennon than you think. I feel bound to tell you this now because of the way you have spoken, which I don't understand, and was very sorry to hear. The other day when you were in a fix down yonder, it was Lennon came to the rescue, and did it unasked, and in the most delicate and handsome way."

"Lennon came to the rescue! Lennon gave the money!"

"Lennon, and no one else. He asked me not to tell; and I didn't ever since, and would not now but that your words and manner show me you are under some delusion or other about him which ought not to exist."

"You are certain of this too — quite certain?"

"The whole thing was done through me."

"Then, Eastham, I am the most unfortunate wretch and the basest devil that ever lived on the earth!"

"What do you mean? What have you done!"

"Eastham, I have been mad — mad! I made a fool of myself about Mrs. Alwyn. Yes, I did; and I exposed my folly to her; and she snubbed me and scorned me; and I lost my reason. I thought I found out that Lennon and she were secretly meeting; and I followed him to Folkestone; and I never knew Grace Ethelstone was there. O, Heaven! why did they deceive me? — why did they make a secret of it, and destroy me? I thought Lennon went there for her — for Myra Alwyn — and I became insane with passion; and this very day I told her husband what I thought I had discovered!"

"Told Dr. Alwyn this horrid story?"

"Yes, I did. I told him I had found out that Ralph Lennon was at Folkestone with his wife."

"Then upon my soul, Warton, you are the greatest scoundrel and the most unfortunate wretch I ever knew. I hardly know whether most to pity you or despise you. I *was* your friend; but you cannot expect that I or any gentleman could call you a friend ever again. You should never again presume to come into the society of men of honour or modest women. My last and earnest advice to you is to go and drown yourself or blow your brains out!"

Eastham literally flung him away; for Warton had grasped him by the arm, and seemed about to essay some pitiful plea or justification of himself. Warton stood for a moment and looked after his former friend, as the latter hurried indignantly westward; then Warton shrugged his shoulders. "He is a good fellow, Eastham," he murmured feebly to himself; "and he once liked me well. Now I have lost him, as I have lost everyone. Everyone! Nobody will ever look at me again! It is all over! All over with Walter Raleigh Warton!" And as he walked slowly down the street he kept murmuring over and over again the name "Walter Raleigh Warton," "Walter Raleigh Warton," as a man might keep whispering to himself the name of some lost love. Indeed that name did represent poor Warton's one only true love — one only abiding and earnest hope. His love had been not so much himself as the Eidolon he had raised of himself, and which, poor wretch, he symbolised in the name of

Walter Raleigh Warton; his hope had been to make that name a sound of influence, a signal of applause.

It was at the Pall-mall end of the Hay-market that he met Eastham. He crossed the street and walked slowly along by the National Gallery and down Trafalgar-square. He stopped a moment at Morley's Hotel, and looked into the hall, and remembered one time — ever so many years ago — when Ralph Lennon and he dined together there joyously in their college days; and he remembered the look of the hall then, and some old figures which used to be there and were gone now; although he had been there scores of times since, and never noticed any change. He found himself looking vacuously into shop-windows, and then wondering what he was looking at. He glanced at the Eleanor's Cross Hotel in the Strand, and tried to hurry past it; but he could not walk quickly. His heart beat so fiercely that he thought the people who passed him in the street must hear it, and he could hardly breathe, and he had a horrible headache; he must get home to the Temple. He might have called a cab; but he seemed now to have an instinctive dread of its rattling motion. No, he would walk slowly, slowly, until he got a little better. He feebly thought he should like to be at home — really at home — lying in bed, and with Mabel to nurse him; and he should like to hear the children talk round his bedside until

he dropped off to sleep. He did not think much now about his position, or his prospects, or the shame into which he had plunged himself. No, he was conscious of nothing more than that he felt weak and queer and giddy, and wanted so much to lie down somewhere. Still creeping on, he suddenly began to fear he was about to be sick or to faint, and he had a vague consciousness of turning down the first quiet street he found — one of those leading to the river — to get out of the crowd and noise and observation of the Strand. He walked a few paces down the street, and looked feebly about for some railings to hold; for his eyes began to swim, and he saw the white clouds dancing about in the blue sky, and the pavement seemed to heave up and down, and the houses to go round, and there was a singing, hissing sound bursting through his ears. He murmured "Water — give some water!" as if anybody could have heard him, or would have heeded; and then he saw some people coming up the street, and he made an effort to steady himself and move on. All this occupied hardly a second; yet it seemed to him a long, queer, dreamlike struggle. He stepped forward a pace or two, but became more unsteady; his head throbbed fiercely; he could see nothing but flickering motion all around him; the singing in his ears grew louder and louder; then a keen, strange, electrical pang shot through his heart, and he staggered about for an instant and fell on the pavement.

"Hillo, Bill," shrieked a ragged street-urchin, "here's a lark! Here's a swell all mops and brooms!"

"O, my eye!" exclaimed Bill, rallying to the cry; "run for Bobby and a stretcher!"

"Dear, dear, what a sight!" said a decent, pallid, poor woman, who came out of one of the houses bearing a bundle of washing. A gentleman, too! Don't, boys; perhaps he is sick — perhaps he is in a fit."

"O, such a fit!" exclaimed one, capering wildly about the prostrate man.

"No, missis, he's drunk," said the other. "I fol-
lered him, an' I seed him staggering along."

"I wish there was a policeman near," said the woman, looking up and down the street in vain.

A respectably-dressed man who was just passing the Strand end of the street looked down, and seeing that something was "up," came towards the little group. He was a dark-complexioned man with short lank hair; and he was rather too well-dressed not to make it apparent that he was of the artisan class, unused to the constant wear of broadcloth.

As he came on, he saw that a person in the attire of a gentleman was lying on the pavement.

"Is he drunk?" the new-comer asked, with scorn in his voice.

But before anyone could answer, he had seen the face.

"Why, my Heavens!" said Tom Berry, "it's Wat Warton!" He stooped down, raised the fallen head upon his knees, and then cried out:

"My God A'mighty, he's dead!"

* * * *

Just at that moment on the outskirts of a little town south of London two children were playing on the grass in front of a house we know. Their mother had been watching them for some time; but the postman had brought a large business-like letter addressed to her — to her specially — and she had gone into the house to read it. Presently she came rustling out, all flushed with excitement and joy:

"Children, children, such good news as I have! O, how I wish Grace were here to listen! But you both must hear it. Listen, Maby; listen, Watty; and put away your horse for a moment. Your old grand-aunt, my aunt Jane Ethelstone, is dead, and here's a letter to say she has left us ten thousand pounds! Ten thousand pounds! So we shall have money enough; and your poor papa will never have to go away from us any more. My dear, dear Walter will be out of all his difficulties now, and he will stay with us always, always! O, how good Heaven is, and how happy we shall all be when papa is always with us!"

CHAPTER XV.

Degeneration of the Heart.

MYRA ALWYN was happy. Perhaps the most fortunate of our people in this book could not have been more happy. For she believed that she had been (under Providence, she took pious care to say) the instrument by which Ralph Lennon and Grace Ethelstone had been brought together; and she regarded herself as by that much of good cleared of the secret sinfulness whereof she was conscious. Poor woman, her sinfulness surely was very slight. Was it sin at all to have felt for a few short moments or months the pang of an irregular affection, and to have utterly conquered it and crushed it, and out of its trampled leaves extracted gracious perfume and goodness? Yet she felt that she had been guilty of some wrong; and if only the heart knows its own bitterness, the heart may be presumed too to know its own evil. Perhaps the chief source of her compunction lay in the fact that she had doubly, although very harmlessly, deceived her husband — once positively when she gave out that her doubts of Lennon's orthodoxy were her sole reason for avoiding his company; once negatively when

she suppressed the story of Warton's ill-omened attentions. But she had sense and womanly shrewdness enough to know that one of these secrets at least she must keep in her own breast, and that the utmost relief she could find must be in appeasing her own conscience. So the moment she discovered that Lennon and Grace loved each other, and were likely, for some strange cause or other, to be separated, she resolved to devote herself to heal that breach, and bring that pair together. That would be her most appropriate penance, her most fruitful expiation. And she accomplished the task, and was happy.

We do not say that her happiness was unmixed with sadness; no happiness men and women know ever is, even for a moment. It may be that as she looked at Grace Ethelstone, and saw her given up wholly in heart and hope to a passionate and romantic love about to be made perfect in union, she did sometimes stifle a sigh, and did perhaps think her own calm married life just a little prosaic and colourless. But she was no heroine of French romance, and indeed no sentimentalist at all; but an energetic young Englishwoman, busy in her life, and who, if she sometimes involuntarily suspected that she had missed the crowning grace of existence — that perfect love of mutual passion which literally blends two natures and two destinies into an insoluble one — only made up her mind the more firmly to turn to account such bless-

ings as she had, and at least cause useful household plants to grow where the passion-flowers might not bloom.

When Dr. Alwyn arrived at Folkestone his wife kissed him more tenderly and warmly perhaps than she had ever done before. Nor was that the only embrace he received; for Myra insisted that Grace Ethelstone should kiss him too, which that obedient young woman did with apparent good-will. And Dr. Alwyn wondered within himself whether he should ever have a daughter of that age, and like her. Of which good fortune — to anticipate events a little, and dispose beforehand of our coming happiness — we are glad to believe there is now reasonable chance. The quiver is not, after all, to be empty for ever.

But this night that we speak of, this event was not yet shadowed forth. Ralph Lennon and Dr. Alwyn had dined in town, having first consulted a publisher about the Flora, and then came to Folkestone together. The whole group sat in a room with a great bay window overlooking the sea, and talked calmly — as English people will do under such circumstances — of things far away from the hearts of all. There was still a shadow on Dr. Alwyn's soul from which he could not wholly emerge, and his wife's eyes often sought his face anxiously, and seemed to find something discouraging there. Yet he did his very best to be in good spirits; and if his wife observed any gloom

or anxiety in him, neither Ralph nor Grace did. It is likely, indeed, that these two were not continuously occupied in watching the expression of Dr. Alwyn's countenance.

One of the ladies sang, the other played an accompaniment. Dr. Alwyn watched them with a curious, inquiring, thoughtful expression. They were both very young — his wife certainly the elder by some years, but looking now just an equal and companion of her friend. Both were handsome women. His wife was smaller, more petite of figure, with whiter face and forehead, with thick clustering dark hair massed about her head and neck. Grace was tall, fair, of full figure, and stately, with short brown hair that must be allowed to curl as it would, and could not be massed or mastered in any way; and lucid steady eyes of deep brown. Certainly, as the two women stood or sat together, she did not look the younger of the two. And one was the girl he had just then wished to have for a daughter — and the other was his wife! Raising his eyes to a mirror, he caught a glimpse of a large worn face, with bare forehead and thick gray hair — gray in its best places, and snow-white in others — and melancholy, unlovely eyes looking sadly into his — and, O, this was his own face, and he was the gray old husband of the dark-haired, pretty young creature who sat there in front of him! And he had heard to-day, for the first time,

that men made love to her — that they suspected others of making love to her; and he learned that the thing, however sinful and criminal, was not wonderful, or contrary to the laws of animal nature; and he began to open his eyes to the sad ludicrous truth that he was a heavy old clergyman married to a pretty, fascinating young wife. He was sorry when the singing was over, and there was a chance that the thoughts which were at his heart might betray themselves in his face.

His reflections were destined to be suddenly disturbed. A knock was heard at the door, and a servant presently came in to say that a person was there who had come from London, and wanted to speak to Mr. Lennon particularly.

"It must be Tom Berry," said Lennon. "I telegraphed for him to come to town; but really, poor fellow, I quite forgot him."

"Mr. Berry, — my patient!" exclaimed Myra. "Bring him in, by all means. I am delighted to see him."

So she waved Lennon back, and went promptly out herself, and returned leading in our old friend Tom Berry. Tom was quite too firm in his faith about nature's equality and the inborn dignity of man to feel much discomposed, under ordinary circumstances, at any introduction to society; but this time he did look confused and even excited.

"Beg pardon of the company, I'm sure," he said, "and sorry to disturb; but I have some very bad and strange news, and I thought I had best —"

Here his eye fell upon Grace Ethelstone, and he stopped in sudden surprise, and endeavoured to make telegraphic signs of comprehensive import to Ralph.

It was too late. Grace had seen the expression, and noted the sudden pause. She turned pale and trembled.

"It is something that relates to me," she said. "Something dreadful has happened. O, tell me at once! Don't, pray, keep me in suspense. — O, Ralph, make him tell me the worst at once!"

"Speak out, Tom," said Ralph calmly. "Let us know all. Miss Ethelstone had better hear it now, whatever it may be."

"Well, miss, — I'm sure I wish I hadn't had to tell it; but Mr. Warton has been taken very bad — and — and —"

"And he's dead!" said Grace.

"God's truth, miss, he's dead!"

"O, poor Mabel! O, the poor little children!"

Lennon caught her in his arms. Shaken and startled as he was, Lennon was the one whom the news least horrified. What thoughts went through the breast of Myra and her husband neither might speak even to the other.

Dr. Alwyn first spoke.

"Are you sure of this, Mr. Berry? I saw Mr. Warton to-day, and was speaking to him."

Grace sprang up eagerly and looked from one to the other.

Tom Berry soon put aside all hope. "I found him," he said, "lying in a street off the Strand, dead. He had only just fallen. The doctors say he had a fit of some kind. I helped to carry him to the 'orspital, and I identified him; and I saw the papers and letters that were on him. God help us all! it was an awful thing."

"God help us all, indeed!" echoed Alwyn. "I saw the man alive, and spoke with him this morning; and now it is hardly nightfall, and he lies dead."

Myra, looking in her husband's eyes, now fixed on her, read that he knew something he did not speak of. She went round rather timidly, and laid her hand appealingly on his. He pressed her trembling fingers affectionately; absolvingly, she thought; and unseen she raised his hand to her lips and kissed it.

"I must go to poor Mabel," said Grace, looking up to Lennon with tearful eyes.

"You must indeed, dearest; but not to-night. Somebody must first tell her what has happened. Nothing has been told her yet?" he said, looking inquiringly at Berry.

"No, Mr. Lennon; I took care of that. I thought

you would be the best person perhaps — or Dr. Alwyn may be.”

“O no,” interposed Grace. “Please let me go at once, Ralph, and tell her. It is dreadful to do; but I think I had better tell her. I understand her best, and I can try to comfort her.”

“Yes, Grace is right,” said Myra. “She shall go, but not to-night. Give the poor lady, poor Mrs. Warton, this one night’s rest in ignorance of her affliction; to-morrow morning Grace shall go.”

It was settled thus. Lennon and Tom Berry returned to town that night.

“They say it must have been disease of the heart,” said Tom Berry, as they walked together to the railway station. “Fatty degeneration of the heart the doctor says it’s likely to come out. I don’t believe a word of it, Mr. Lennon! Poor Wat Warton was ruined from beginning to end, and killed at last, I think, for the want of a heart. If he’d had any sort of heart, sir, he’d ha’ been alive and well, and maybe rich and happy, to-day.”

Tom was not talking satirically or scornfully, or even metaphorically, but in sober earnest, and as one who confidently pronounces his serious judgment on a difficult case.

“He couldn’t help it, poor fellow,” he went on moralising. “He had nothing very bad in him, only he just had no heart — that was all.”

Lennon only shook his head, and said nothing. He preferred not to hear of Warton's faults and wants just now. He remembered when he and the dead man were friends, and then friendly rivals, and then rivals friendly no more; and he could not think without deep emotion over the strangeness of the fate which had brought them together in close relationship once again, only that he might be present at the last scene of his old companion's life-tragedy.

Meanwhile Walter Warton lay at the Charing Cross Hospital, a livid fearful spectacle; all his ambition, and egotism, and passion, and hope having gone out in ignoble death. The story of his fate had already found its way about the clubs, although it did not get into any of the evening papers. Men told each other of it in smoking-rooms and libraries, and over late dinner-tables. It made its way too into the lobby of the House of Commons; and Shavers, M.P., asked Wynter, M.P., about it.

"I say, Wynter, you knew Warton, didn't you?"

"Warton? What Warton? Warton of the Legation at Florence?"

"No, no; Warton the Democrat. He who stood for Northinglen the other day."

"O, *that* Warton! Warton the Tory, you mean. Fellow who used to spout at the working men's meetings, and then turned Tory, and was taken up by

the Carlton people. Yes, I knew him; what about him?"

"Only that he's dead, that's all."

"Dead? When?"

"To-day, I hear."

"What did he die of? — Toryism on the brain?"

"Poisoned himself, I am told. He was found dead somewhere, Millingbury says, with a bottle in his hand containing essence of something or other. They say he was dreadfully dipped in railway affairs."

"Not a bit of it. Pursued by remorse I should rather say."

"Another John Sadleir business, Millingbury says."

"Here's Eastham — it concerns him and his friends — and he ought to know."

Captain Eastham was hurrying across the lobby to get an orange, which he meant to quarter in order that it might refresh the lips of his chief, who was taking a rhetorical survey of the home and foreign business of the past six months, previous to the close of a long and weary session.

"I say, Eastham, you knew Warton, who came out under the wing of your people for Northinglen?"

"Yes; what of him?"

"He's dead."

"Dead! Impossible! Who says so?"

"Shavers says so."

"Millingbury told me."

"It can't be. It must be some mistake. I don't believe it."

"Eastham thinks a man becomes immortal when he turns Tory," said Wynter. "Settle it among yourselves. If the man is dead, I'm sorry, as far as that goes; but he is no loss to *us*, and, personally, I always thought him a spouting humbug."

And this was Walter Warton's epitaph, pronounced just outside those doors to pass between which he would at one time have willingly staked his chance of ever entering the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Eastham traced the story to its source, and found out its reality. He jumped into a cab and hurried to Charing Cross Hospital. As he was entering, he rushed against Lennon, who, followed by Tom Berry, was just coming out.

"Is it true — have you seen him, Lennon?" Eastham asked feverishly.

"It is true; and I have seen him."

"He is dead?"

"Dead. He fell in the street this afternoon; some heart-disease it seems. Poor fellow! You remember his fainting that night on the platform at Northinglen?"

"To be sure — I remember it now — I had forgotten all about it. I won't go to look at him now — I know enough. It would make me sick to see him. Do you know, Lennon, when I heard this I felt exactly

as if I had received a gunshot wound? I felt as if I had killed him — unfortunate fellow!”

“I don’t understand. What had you to do with it?”

“I met him to-day in the street — in the Haymarket — and we quarrelled. It was not my fault; but I did tell him my mind very sharply; and I left him in a passion; and it could not have been long before this terrible thing happened.”

But Lennon never knew the cause of the quarrel and his own innocent share in it; that secret Eastham faithfully kept.

So did Dr. Alwyn keep the secret of what had been told to him by the man now dead. That night when Mrs. Alwyn and her husband were left alone there was a sad uneasy silence for a moment; then he looked to her and began in a low serious tone,

“Myra!”

“Yes, Alwyn,” his wife replied very meekly and deprecatingly.

“You did wrong, dear, in not having told me at once what you knew about this most unfortunate man. Stay, let me speak. I don’t blame you — I know it was a delicate and painful subject, such as a woman shrinks from speaking of. But you ought to have told me; there ought to be no secret between us. One evil thing it has done — a small thing, perhaps, in itself, but to be regretted — is that from it other secrecies have grown. I have heard something which

I should rather not speak of, even to you, for the present; some time you shall hear it too, but not now."

Poor Myra was all crimsoning and palpitating, and had no Fatima desire whatever to explore the secrets of that one sealed closet.

"This I hope and believe will be our last time for having secrets from each other. I will not ask you to promise —"

"No, indeed — indeed you need not. I will never again have any secret from you, my dear, kind, noble husband. I did it for the best, dearest — indeed I did; but it shall never be again. O, forgive me!"

She threw herself into her husband's arms.

"You have confidence in me, Myra? You don't look on me as a dreadful old fellow — too old for sympathy — and — and — love?"

"For shame, to ask me such a question, or to have such a doubt! O, Alwyn, I love you better than all the world!"

And it was true; and she was absolved; and the volume of the past was clasped, not ever to be re-opened.

They talked awhile, more calmly, of unfortunate Warton and his sudden fate, and the position of his wife and orphans.

"They will have a stanch friend in Lennon," said Dr. Alwyn.

"And in Grace," added his wife. "Except in a

worldly point of view, *he* is not much of a loss even to them. He was an unprincipled and wicked man."

"My dear," replied her husband quietly, "if he was wild, let us remember, as Dr. Johnson said of another poor creature, that he is so no more."

CHAPTER XVI.

Lennon's first and last Untruth.

"DEAR Grace, how glad I am you have come! I was dying to see you. I have *such* good news for you!"

These were the words with which Mabel Warton, all flushed and glowing — and, it must be owned, puffing too — with happiness and eagerness, greeted her niece the morning after the night of the last chapter. Then she saw Grace's pale face, and eyes purple-fringed from tears and sleeplessness, and she saw that a tragedy of some sort was written there; and she suddenly stopped in her speech, affrighted and aghast.

Grace put her arm round Mabel's neck and brought her into a quiet room; and the whole was soon told. Grace had the spirit and sense to spare the unfortunate woman the racking, sickening prelude of torture which sagacious people think it right to inflict by way of preparing the mind of the sufferer for the blow that is to come. The whole news came upon Mabel with a merciful swiftness and calmness. Let us say no more on that subject. Does a man still suffer torture after

his neck has been severed by the axe? I don't know. Did Charlotte Corday really feel shame and agony when the executioner smote the cheek of her guillotined head? I don't know. I could not describe the sensations if I did know. I cannot now describe the sensations of a poor, weak, loving, widowed woman, who had only one idol in life, and learned now all in a moment that she had lost it for ever.

One good thing was, that the death of her husband did not mean starvation or the workhouse for her children. This she came to be thankful for after a time, but just now she thought nothing of it. Indeed, in a worldly point of view, she was far better off now than ever she had been. She had money enough to live on, and to bring her children up well; and strong kindly hearts and brains cared for her interests and theirs. The boy will be a railway engineer yet, and perhaps will make a name; the girl will never go to a boarding-school, but will be all the better taught at home, and will very often go on long visits to her cousin Grace in England and abroad. For it is not probable that cousin Grace and her husband will spend much of their time in England, for a few years at least. They are to live for a while in Rome, and Grace is to study art there, and become a famous sculptor. So she intends. But the sculpture never comes to anything. Antigone never grows to completeness. While the artist was at work over the

marble form there appeared the first of a succession of little living forms, and the chisel, alas, was flung away for the pap-spoon! To be resumed, of course, some other time. To be resumed when Ralph gets leisure to begin another volume of poems, or to become the exponent of new theories for the regeneration of the human race. To be resumed when Tom Berry, now the active manager of the Waterdale cottage property, sees the dream of his youth, the glorious Charter of the People, become a reality — the starting-point of a new agitation for the attainment of the equality of man. To be resumed when Myra Alwyn has completed her exquisite painting, never yet begun, of the Broken Hero by the lone Swiss lake.

All this, of course, is anticipating. But it is only anticipating what every rational reader must expect; and when things have come to that pass that no rapidity of condensation on the author's part can possibly finish the story as fast as the reader can finish it for himself, it matters little how, or how soon, we come to an end. Ralph Lennon, of course, married his second love; indeed, in the true sense, his only love. They went abroad for a while, and after travelling from country to country, took a long rest at Rome. But Lennon was not a man who could lead an idle life, nor was his wife a woman who could encourage even love-in-idleness. He will return to settle in England, probably; will engage himself in politics, and

even in money-making of some kind; and very likely will ultimately represent the borough of Northinglen in the House of Commons. But it is not probable he will make any great success there as a debater. His life was one which had few successes, except the one worth all others earth could give him — the winning of a heart that could unite with his and be true to him; and even this success came not soon, but somewhat late to him. The best of his life was its Indian summer.

Ralph Lennon was a truthful man; but it is only just to record here that he once spoke a false word. It was thus. When Grace and he, after their marriage (which was delayed some months by Warton's death and the necessity of caring for his widow), were taking leave of Mabel, Mrs. Warton of course wept and prayed for their happiness.

"But you will be happy, Grace my dear," she said; "for you are marrying the best of men, except my own dear Walter. Ah, Ralph, you will not forget him — your old friend? You knew him since he was a boy. Did you ever know so good and pure a man?"

Ralph was staggered by this sad home thrust, and he would have evaded reply if he could. But Mabel looked wonderingly and almost impatiently at him, and pressed her question:

"Did you, Ralph, ever know anyone — any

man, I mean — so good and pure as my poor Walter?"

Ralph stooped down, kissed her, and said in a low tone,

"Never, Mabel; never!"

This was the first, and let us hope the last, falsehood ever told by Ralph Lennon. Under the circumstances, perhaps he may be forgiven.

THE END.

The waterdale neighbours

Bd.: 2

Leipzig 1868

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